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Beneath the Cross of Jesus

A. Leonard Griffith

*BENEATH THE
CROSS OF JESUS*

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CROSS OF JESUS

by

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To the congregation of
Chalmers United Church
Ottawa, Canada,
this volume is
affectionately and gratefully
dedicated.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SCANDAL OF THE CROSS

"... but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

(1 Corinthians 1: 23-24)

AT the heart and centre of the Christian religion stands one symbol—a Cross. F. W. Dillistone¹ points out that other systems revolve around other symbols—"the crescent, the sickle, the lotus flower, the spinning wheel, the sun's disc, the living flame"—but Christianity revolves around a Cross. When Christianity loses touch with the Cross, it grows weak; when it renews contact, it renews its strength.

At first sight this appears to be one of the strange facts in the whole history of the human race. Does not man love life? Yet the Cross points to death. Does not man strive for victory? Yet the Cross tells of defeat. Does not man labour to establish harmony and concord? Yet the Cross produces disruption and discord. Does not man delight in all that is fair and beautiful? Yet the Cross suggests all that is crude and ugly. Why has this symbol, this first-century gallows, been so jealously guarded and retained, given a place of honour in our churches, worn with a mixture of humility and pride as a piece of costume jewellery? Having regard to the actual historic circumstances, it is surely strange that men should have set the Cross in the forefront instead of the background, that they should be proud rather than ashamed of this sign of ignominy and defeat.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many people, otherwise sympathetic with Christianity, should be embarrassed by the

Cross, and that to some the Cross should actually be an offence and a scandal. Indeed, as you ponder the deep mystery of religion, have you not found yourself asking why Almighty God could not have achieved our salvation without setting a cruel Cross at the heart of it? An agnostic poet has asked this question quite frankly. In a well-known sonnet he declares that mankind is tired of

"The cross, the crown of thorns, the anguished eyes,
The cruel wounds, unstanch'd and bleeding yet."

He goes on to say, "Let us forget once and for all the Christ of Calvary; his physical anguish ceased long ago. Let us remember only Jesus of Nazareth and seek to follow his sublime teaching and example." So declares the agnostic poet, and such is the scandal of the Cross to an unbelieving mind.

There is nothing new about this sense of revulsion against the sordid spectacle of Calvary. Since the days of the early Church men have questioned the value and necessity of the Cross to the very faith which it symbolizes. Paul expressed the attitude of his own day when he said, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness." So far as devout Jews were concerned, the Cross proved Jesus an impostor. They jeered on that black Friday, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross. . . ." A crucified Messiah could not save the world. How, therefore, could he be the Messiah? The Greeks, on the other hand, were a sophisticated people, hospitable enough to Christianity if it appealed to them intellectually; but a religion that deified a dead carpenter—they found that just a little foolish.

It were well to begin this study by facing up to what has been called "the scandal of the Cross", asking ourselves the age-long question: Why was the Cross necessary? Why must Jesus die? We have often fancied how much better it would have been if during that last fateful week Jesus had slipped

quietly out of Jerusalem and withdrawn to some distant place where he could work uninterrupted and unmolested; if Jesus had lived to a ripe old age and continued his ministry of preaching and healing among people who appreciated him; if he had trained thousands of apostles instead of twelve and sent them out to all parts of the world. This would have been *our* plan for Jesus; certainly it was Peter's plan and Judas's, and we know that for one indecisive moment it passed through the Master's own mind. But apparently God planned otherwise. Why? Why must Jesus die? Why did there have to be a Cross?

I

There had to be a Cross as *the logical outcome of our Lord's ministry*. A human career can be like a guided missile. Scientific laws determine its trajectory, and so long as those laws obtain, nothing can deflect the missile from its target. For example, when Hitler came to power in Germany, he created a situation in which men had either to renounce their Christian allegiance or suffer grim consequences. Anyone living in the Hitler régime who declared, as Martin Niemöller did, "Not Hitler but God is my Führer," knew perfectly well that the logical and inevitable outcome would be his own destruction. A few, like Niemöller, managed to survive the concentration camp, but there were countless others, like Paul Schneider, a Lutheran pastor, of whom it was written, "he took up his heavy cross almost as if it were a trinket and went the long, bitter way of his own passion."

Someone has said of Jesus, "The principles he adopted for his life led inevitably to his death, and his death revealed and summed up the purpose of his life." At the very beginning his life took a certain course, and the human situation being what it was, the end of that course could only be destruction. There was simply no other alternative. Something had to change;

he had to change, or the hearts and minds of men had to change; but as long as both remained constant, then the outcome was inevitable.

The artist, Holman Hunt, caught this truth in his famous painting "The Shadow of Death", which shows our Lord as he must have been during the silent years in Nazareth—a full-grown carpenter, the man of the house, the eldest of many children, earning his bread and theirs by the sweat of his brow. It is said that when this picture was first exhibited in the North of England, the hard-working men of Lancashire and Yorkshire saved their weekly pence to purchase two-guinea engravings of it, because it presented to them not the pale Christ of the creeds, but a Christ they could understand. As the young carpenter rises from his cramped position at the work bench and stretches out his arms to relax them, he casts on the wall behind him the outline of a cross. Nearby stands his mother, Mary, her face fear-stricken as she beholds the ominous shadow. Perhaps she remembers the aged Simeon who prophesied, even in her child's infancy, "a sword will pierce through your own soul also".

With this very issue Jesus wrestled at the outset of his career in the wilderness of temptation. There in that place of demons he had to decide on the exact course that his ministry should take, and there the devil held before him those expedients which ancient and modern intellectuals would choose in place of the Cross. However we interpret the temptations, they all add up to the same thing—the employment of human methods to do the work of God, a ministry with the Cross removed from its path and therefore a ministry that ultimately God must reject. In refusing to turn stones into bread, or to leap from the pinnacle of the temple, or to bow the knee to Satan, Jesus renounced those very means by which he might have found favour with men and he committed himself to a way of life which would incur man's hostility and bring him inevitably to his death.

It did not take long for that to become plain. Scarcely had

Jesus begun mingling with the multitudes than some wished him out of their sight, feeling toward him as Iago did toward Cassio "He hath a daily beauty that makes me ugly." Scarcely had he performed his first miracle, than the Scribes and Pharisees, consumed with jealous rage, began murmuring that he must be a blasphemer possessed by the devil. Scarcely had he preached his first sermon and the common people heard him gladly, than religious parties, mutually hostile, patched up their differences and began plotting his death. Came a time when the hostility reached a crisis, and from that moment onward Jesus took every opportunity to warn his disciples of the impending doom. At last he set his face like a flint to go to Jerusalem, entering the Holy City as one who had come to die. Not that evil men forced this thing upon him; he chose it deliberately; he had been moving toward it since that day when he came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the Gospel."

Yet even the Master himself faltered in Gethsemane. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . . ." We cannot explain this anguished cry as a physical shrinking from the pain of death. To say that were to make Jesus less heroic than the great human martyrs. We can only believe that even to him in the eleventh hour the scandal of the Cross must have become suddenly apparent. He, too, must have questioned that this revolting spectacle of shame and defeat, this utter capitulation to the powers of evil, could possibly be within the will of a sovereign and loving God. Quickly, however, he must have seen the moral impossibility of deflecting the missile at the last minute from its target. How could he possibly evade the Cross now, when from the very beginning he had walked the way of a Cross? He must go to Calvary; it was the logical outcome of his life. And that is our first answer to what seems like the scandal of the Cross: that Christ and his Cross are indissolubly bound up together and that each can be explained only in terms of the other.

II

There had to be a Cross, because *the Cross has always been God's way of dealing with men*. It is not just any Cross that fills the horizon of our thoughts, but a particular Cross, the Cross of Jesus Christ, of him in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. A dramatic painting by Eugène Carrière hangs in the Louvre. As you come upon it, it seems to be a mere blending of shadows and darkness. Nothing seems to break the unrelieved night. As you walk closer, you see vaguely the outline of a Cross hidden behind the veil of shadows. Then, as you look longer, you become strangely aware that behind the Cross are the dim outlines of a figure with hands outstretched, holding the Cross; and the agony on the face hidden by the shadows is more terrible than the agony on the face of him who hangs on the Cross. You see what the artist dares us to believe: that God was on Golgotha, that it was Almighty God who hung and suffered there; that it was the Creator and Ruler of the universe who for some reason allowed cruel, wicked men to beat and scourge and mock and spit upon him and kill him in the most brutal of deaths.

It recalls the closing scene in Marc Connolly's play, *The Green Pastures*.² You may remember that it is the story of God and his people as seen through the eyes of an old Negro preacher. We feel a bit startled by its crude anthropomorphism, as it pictures the genial Deity smoking a five-cent "seegar" and tossing off an occasional miracle to amuse himself and the angels; but we can get beneath these homely externals to a serious understanding of Bible history. God has created a good earth, and he has made man to love and serve him, but man rebels against God and chooses to live life on his own terms, turning his earthly paradise into a chaos. Angrily God chastises man, punishes him, does everything he can think of to bring this recalcitrant child to his senses, but no use; man will not obey him. At last God appears ready to chuck the whole business and tells Gabriel so, when suddenly he learns of an

obscure prophet on earth, one Hosea whose wife has been unfaithful to him and deserted him, yet who still loves her and clings to her and will not let her go. Is that how God must reach out to men—by suffering with them and for them? The play closes with the angels looking over the rim of heaven and listening to the human scream that rises from earth. "Look at that man carrying his cross up the hill! That's a terrible burden for one man to carry!"

God has always borne this terrible burden. That ancient Christian symbol, a cross encircled by a ring, proclaims the sacrificial love which has been in God's great heart from all eternity. The Lamb slain on Calvary is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. What God did on Golgotha he has been doing from the beginning of time; Golgotha gave dramatic visibility to it. God has always been thrusting himself into the human situation, following man wherever he strays, standing by him in his shame, refusing to leave him and bearing all the burden of his sin. The writer of the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm meditated on the wonder of God's pursuing grace, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" The Hebrew poet simply could not figure out why Almighty God, who holds the stars in their courses, should leave the universe to run itself while he chases after one stupid mortal, like a shepherd leaving the rest of his flock to search for a single stray. "God knows all about me," he cried incredulously, "God knows the smallest detail of my life. . . . And God not only knows; he cares. He wants me, so desperately, that I cannot escape from him—not in heaven, for that is God's dwelling-place; even in hell his love tracks me down and finds me!"

Inevitably that kind of love has to suffer. As surely as night follows day, it will end upon a Cross. Any parent who has ever been disappointed in a child knows that. There was a minister who had a reprobate son, a delinquent of the worst kind. This saintly man and his wife had done everything they could think of for the boy—sent him to a private school and faced the

disgrace of his expulsion, helped him get started in business and paid for his failure. The lad seemed to have no conscience at all, no gratitude. He was always leaving home—to work in a circus, perhaps, or get a job on a river freighter. His parents never heard from him until the police telephoned from some distant city demanding that they get him out of jail or retrieve him from some other kind of trouble. On these occasions the father never argued with the boy, never reprimanded him. Each time he would go to him and say, "All right, son, let's go home." Once in a sober mood, the boy burst out, "Dad, why do you keep coming after me? Why don't you give up and just let me rot?" Then his father said something strangely reminiscent of the Old Testament, "I have made and I will bear. You are my son. Your mother and I love you, and as long as there is breath in our bodies, we will stand by you."

That is our second answer as we face what seems like the scandal of the Cross. The Cross is bound up with all that we know of God's dealings with men. Calvary did not make the love of God, but the love of God made Calvary. Through it God seems to say, "You can do with me what you like; you can break my bones and drain my blood and bruise my flesh, but you cannot stop me from being what I am, the Father who loves you and will not let you go."

III

There had to be a Cross; *there would be no Gospel without it*. Well might the Cross be a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness, because neither Jews nor Greeks had a Gospel. Judaism, as it evolved in later years, became a compound of legalism and ritualistic practices, while the Greek religions were always a compound of ethics and mysticism. Many modernists would reduce Christianity to exactly that, but as D. T. Niles, a great Church leader from Ceylon, has

written, "Christianity is not an affirmation of ideals which men must test and practise. It is not an explanation of life and its problems about which men must argue and with which in some form they must agree. It is rather the announcement of an event with which men must reckon." The very word "Gospel" means "good news", and the writers of the New Testament are neither prophets nor theologians instructing us in some new religious system; they are reporters witnessing by their writings and by their lives to an event which has taken place. This thing happened; they have seen it, and they do not want to theorize about it, they simply want to tell us about it. God has done something supernatural and conclusive which has once and for all changed the situation of man on this earth. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." That is the Gospel, and of that Gospel the Cross is an integral part.

It needed a Cross to bring God and man together. That is what we mean by "atonement" (at-one-ment), the restoring of that relationship between God and man which man in his disobedience has broken. Atonement is never easy. We know from our human experience what it costs to repair a broken relationship. The initiative must be taken and the brunt of the cost borne by the injured party. The offender may apologize himself blue in the face, but his apologies strike a blank wall until the person he has hurt extends forgiveness. Nor can there be any true forgiveness apart from some costly act of reconciliation, a complete sacrifice of pride on the part of the one injured, going where the offender is and refusing to leave him, standing beside him in his shame, sharing all the consequences of his sin and bearing on his own heart the whole burden of the offender's guilt.

On the evening of April 25th, 1958, a young Korean exchange student, a leader in student Christian affairs in the University of Pennsylvania, left his flat and went to the corner to post a letter to his parents in Pusan. Turning from the mailbox he stepped into the path of eleven leather-jacketed teenage

boys. Without a word they attacked him, beating him with a black-jack, a lead pipe and with their shoes and fists. Later, when the police found him in the gutter, he was dead. All Philadelphia cried out for vengeance. The District Attorney secured legal authority to try the boys as adults so that those found guilty could be given the death penalty. Then a letter arrived from Korea that made everyone stop and think. It was signed by the parents and by twenty other relatives of the murdered boy. It read in part:

“Our family has met together and we have decided to petition that the most generous treatment possible within the laws of your government be given to those who have committed this criminal action . . . In order to give evidence of our sincere hope contained in this petition, we have decided to save money to start a fund to be used for the religious, educational, vocational and social guidance of the boys when they are released . . . We have dared to express our hope with a spirit received from the Gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ who died for our sins.”

In his book, *The Faith of a Scholar*, David Swenson has written, “I stand in need of a religion of pardon and grace, of a religion that offers and effects a relationship to a Divine reality that can reconstitute the integrity of the personality.”³ The supreme fact which governed human life from Adam to Christ, and the supreme fact governing the lives of multitudes of people today, is the fact of alienation from God. We have broken God’s laws by our deeds and by our words and by the sinful affections of our hearts; we have betrayed the love that loves us ultimately; ours has been the crime that murdered God’s only-begotten Son, and nothing but a costly, atoning act of God himself can restore the relationship which we have destroyed. The Cross may indeed seem like a scandal, but there is no Gospel without it. Remove the Cross, and you remove from Christianity the one decisive factor that makes it “a religion of pardon and grace, a religion that offers and effects a relationship to a

Divine reality that can reconstitute the integrity of the personality." Therefore, "we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAGNETISM OF THE CROSS

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

(St. John 12:32)

HERE is a strange paradox: that a man dying a criminal's death, a man hanging on two beams of wood, naked, tortured, pitilessly taunted by remorseless and exultant enemies, should attract us to himself as iron filings are attracted to a magnet. It ought to be the other way round. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will drive all men away from me." Have we really plumbed the awful depths of Calvary and come to terms with its utter degradation, disgrace and defeat? A cross was the most repulsive spectacle in the ancient world. "To bind a Roman citizen," cried Cicero, "is an outrage; to scourge him a crime; it almost amounts to parricide to put him to death; and how shall I describe crucifixion? No adequate word can be found to represent so execrable an enormity." When *Life Magazine*, in an issue devoted to the Christian Faith, reproduced on its front cover the Great Werden Crucifix, an eleventh century masterpiece now in Essen, Germany, many people were shocked by this grim portrayal of an emaciated, dying Christ who "had no form or comeliness that we should look on him, and no beauty that we should desire him." Yes, it is one of the strange paradoxes of the human race that men should be attracted to the Cross.

A still stranger paradox is that the Cross should be the supreme means of grace, the strongest link binding God and man together. For this was not just any cross on Calvary, but the Cross of him who said, "He that hath seen me hath seen

the Father." This lonely figure, shamed, mocked, beaten, spat upon, his life-blood slowly ebbing away, had claimed to be the Son of God, and for three short years, as he brought into subjection the forces of nature, evil, disease and death, his claim had seemed valid. But wicked men crucified him; and he let them do it, he who, if he had been God's anointed, could surely have crushed their sinister designs in one decisive stroke. Even his disciples lost hope after Golgotha. As one exclaimed sadly on the Emmaus Road, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." How could it possibly be so?

One of the worthier Broadway plays produced in 1958 was James Forsyth's *Héloïse*.¹ It tells the tender and agonizing story of Peter Abélard, that brilliant and controversial scholar of the twelfth century, and his love for the beautiful Héloïse. We cannot understand why it would have hampered Abélard's career if his marriage had been made public and why it was necessary for his beloved to renounce him and enter a convent, but there is no doubt that this experience of sacrificial love spoke to him of the love of God and especially that it influenced his interpretation of the Cross. Abélard swept aside the traditional theory of the Cross as a penalty paid by Christ to atone for the sins of mankind. The Cross, declared Abélard, is God's own act of free grace whereby he takes upon himself the burden of man's sin and guilt. Men see this act of suffering love, and it makes them ashamed of their sins; it awakens their gratitude and releases within them new springs of love that make them new creatures reconciled to God. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." That is, after all, the theological basis of many of our great hymns,

"When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."

No theology is big enough to contain the whole truth about the Cross of Jesus Christ. Even Abélard's so-called "moral influence" theory falls short when it predicates the "finished" work of God upon our capacity to respond to the Cross. We are not thinking of theories, however, but of facts. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." About this daring saying of the Master, one fact stands out in bold relief: that this is no longer theory; it has become history; it has validated itself in terms of human life. The Cross *has* drawn men to God and it has succeeded where all else has failed. Men and women, who could be indifferent and even hostile to the precepts and institutions of religion, have surveyed this wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died, and their frozen hearts have melted and their souls cried aloud to God for pardon and grace. How shall we explain the magnetic power of Calvary? Wherein lies the peculiar appeal of the Cross?

I

The Cross *appeals to our understanding*. Henry Sloane Coffin tells that once in China he asked a group of Chinese pastors what it was that impressed them the most about Jesus. One elderly man replied, "His washing the disciples' feet."² An action, something that Jesus did, the significance of which these orientals could understand—that had drawn them to Christ. And that surely points up the difference between Christianity and other great world religions. One must be indoctrinated into these ethnic faiths, one must study their philosophies and probe their mysteries, because they have their origin in the minds and souls of men. Christianity has its origin in an act of God, not an idea of God, but an act of God, something that God has done, something visible, concrete and historic, something that the simplest mind can understand.

I recall a personal experience common to theological students

in their early college years. I had been given a weekend preaching assignment and had spent many hours preparing a learned discourse that would give evidence of all that my professors had taught me up to that point. At two o'clock on Sunday afternoon I arrived at the church, one of those little frame structures at a country crossroads, and I took a look at the congregation—humble farmers and their families all decked out in their Sunday best and all eager to hear what this young man from the city would have to say to them. I looked at them and began to perspire. Somehow my dissertation did not seem even scholarly any more; it just seemed dull and hopelessly irrelevant. Here were these good folk on a hot Sunday afternoon in the summer hungering for the bread of life, and I was about to hand them stale crusts.

It occurred to me afterwards that a Roman Catholic priest would never find himself in so awkward a position. Regardless of where he goes, to a city cathedral or a country conventicle, he will conduct the same form of worship, and whatever his congregation, be they peasants or philosophers, they will find that worship a means of grace. Why? Because the priest *does* something. He performs an action, and people can understand an action. The largest, the strongest, the most influential segment of Christendom meets week after week, not to hear what God has said, but to be reminded of what God has done. This appeals to people; it draws them. They feel befuddled by the intricacies of theology. They know that the Being of God is a Being shrouded in mystery and that there is so much in the Christian Faith that not even the most gifted preacher can make clear to them. They look at the Cross, however, and their minds are at peace. God has done something on the Cross. He has stepped on the stage of history and acted in a way that we can understand.

When someone asked Pavlova, the great Russian dancer, what she meant by a certain dance, she replied, "Do you think I would have danced it if I could have said it?" Certain truths will not clothe themselves in words; as vehicles of communication,

words are not big enough to contain their meaning. God has a Word, a language of love through which he has been trying to reach out and save man from the very dawn of Creation. God spoke that Word through the marvels of nature, through the events of history, through the utterances of great prophets and the writings of inspired men, but people would not listen to his Word, and if they did listen, they failed to understand. So God stopped speaking and did something. At a precise point in the world's history, God clothed his eternal Word in human flesh, in the skin and blood and bones and sinew, the mind and personality of a man named Jesus of Nazareth who died upon a Cross. We can understand this Jesus. We can understand his life and we can understand his death; and because we understand him, he draws us like a magnet to God.

II

The Cross *appeals also to our deepest emotions*. Therein lies its magnetism: not so much that it kindles the understanding of our minds, but that it moves us to the depths of our being and strikes an answering chord in our hearts.

The suffering of the Cross stirs our pity. We look at Calvary and we want to weep. We feel what the psychologists call "empathy" toward this maligned and tortured Galilean. As we read in the Gospels the vivid account of his Passion, the whole brutal episode seems to be happening to us; rough hands that seized and jostled him in the Garden of Gethsemane; fists that buffeted his blindfolded face in the mock trial before Caiaphas; the leather scourge that tore his skin to shreds as the fierce crowd cried for his death; the heavy Cross that nearly broke his back as he carried it to the place of execution; the huge spikes that pierced his hands and feet like a red-hot poker; the noonday sun that beat on him relentlessly as he hung dying between two thieves; the jeering mob, the gambling soldiers,

the sponge soaked with vinegar, the spear thrust in his side. We can almost feel the life slipping away from him, the pain racking his body, the terrible exhaustion, the swimming sensation in his head. "O God, let him die!" we cry out, and as merciful death claims him, our hearts break with grief.

The injustice of the Cross stirs our indignation. This man was innocent. The Roman Governor who judged him recognized his innocence; so did the penitent thief hanging at his side. In the Roman Empire they reserved this ghastly form of capital punishment for the worst criminals. Not only was Jesus not guilty of any crime, but anyone with anything but a completely distorted vision could see that he was the purest, gentlest, noblest and kindest man who ever lived. In the year A.D. 500, when men still lived by the sword, Clovis I, King of the Frankish Empire, was converted to Christianity. Upon hearing the crucifixion story for the first time, he jumped to his feet, unsheathed his sword and shouted, "If I and my Franks had been there, they would not have done that to him!" We feel a like indignation. Our fists clench and our blood boils as we look at the Cross, this grossest travesty of justice ever perpetrated by stupid and wicked men.

The heroism of the Cross stirs our admiration. You can search the annals of history and literature, and you will find nothing to match the magnificence of the Master in the dark hours of his Passion—his perfect poise when everyone around him went berserk, the majesty of his silence under suffering, his kingliness, even with a crown of thorns ripping his head. We listen to his words of love from the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. . . . Woman, behold thy son; son, behold thy mother. . . . Today thou shalt be with me in paradise. . . ." Crucifixion was all in a day's work for Roman soldiers; they scarcely paid attention to their victims; they had become hardened and calloused in this grim business of killing. However, the centurion who crucified Christ must have felt himself shaken to the very core of his being. Never had he seen anyone die like that before, a man

with such calmness and dignity, such poise and self-mastery. In that awful moment an insight flooded the pagan soul of this tough executioner, an insight that eluded even the pious, especially the pious—that this was not just another man dying on the Cross. “Truly this man was a Son of God,” exclaimed the centurion.

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” This has happened. Men have been drawn to Christ not by his teaching, or by his miracles, or by the character of his personality, but by the sight of him hanging between two thieves, executed like a common criminal. The Cross is a revolting spectacle. We survey its horror and we want to be sick. Yet we cannot take our eyes off the Cross because it grips and magnetizes our gaze. This is no human drama, no historical accident. This is deep calling unto deep, the innermost depths of God’s suffering love laid bare before the whole world, and from the depths of our being we cannot help but respond to it.

III

The Cross *appeals to our dignity as human beings*. Have you ever thought of the dramatic contrast between coercion and persuasion that confronts us on Calvary?—on the one side, the Roman Empire, one of the mightiest concentrations of compulsive power in history; and on the other, Jesus saying, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. . . . Lift me up, even though it be upon a Cross; make visible my quality of life and love and sacrifice, and in the long run man’s heart will respond to it, and I will draw all men unto me.”

This contrast has terrific reality in the world today. A group of Christian leaders came together to discuss the Hydrogen Bomb, this paradoxical situation where our security depends on our possession of weapons which, if we use them, will destroy us. One member of the group said in effect, “We have no

recourse but to unilateral disarmament. Regardless of what our enemies do, we must stop making bombs and renounce all reliance on nuclear weapons." To which someone replied, "Provided, of course, that we are willing to accept the consequence, which means being conquered by our enemies." "That doesn't necessarily follow," said the first member; "our enemies may intimidate us, they may occupy us, but it takes more than the threat of military reprisals to keep us under subjection. No nation is ever really conquered until it is spiritually won."

We may apply that truth to many areas of life. Here is a criminal committed to prison—embittered, rebellious, angry, cursing God and man. He can never be coerced out of his criminal ways. You can imprison him for years, put him in solitary confinement, starve him, beat him, do anything you like to his body, but you can never conquer his spirit, just because he is a human being and not an animal. Nothing conquers that man until he surrenders inwardly to the gentle and gracious and irresistible force of persuasion. In the slums of London, General Booth of the Salvation Army dealt with a hardened character who believed in neither God nor goodness, and who, after endless encounters with the police, remained an obdurate and sullen soul. But one day after months of patient dealing, General Booth saw that man's citadel surrender. "Love and kindness," the man sobbed, as he broke down before the General's goodwill.

Someone has said that we cannot make living things grow with a sledge-hammer no matter how hard we pound. Human beings have a dignity, and only that which respects their dignity and appeals to it can win them. Is it not true that whatever is finest in our characters was not flogged into us, but was drawn out by the sight of something lovely and good and sacrificial to which we responded? Rufus Jones, the great Quaker, told that once in his boyhood he was charged by his parents to stay home and weed the turnip patch while they went out for the afternoon. He had just begun when some

friends came along and persuaded him to go fishing, promising to help with the weeding when they got back. But no fisherman has ever marked the passing of time, and when young Rufus returned home after dark, his mother was waiting for him. Silently she led him to his room. He knew what to expect and he offered no word in extenuation.

"But then," writes Rufus Jones, "a miracle happened instead. Mother put me in a chair, kneeled down, put her hands on me and told God all about me. She interpreted her dream of what my life was to be. She portrayed the boy and the man of her hopes. She told God what she had always expected me to be. And then how I disappointed her hope. 'O God,' she said, 'take this boy of mine and make him the boy and man he is divinely designed to be.' Then she bent over and kissed me and went out and left me alone in the silence with God."³

The human heart cannot resist such a gracious and loving appeal, and that is what draws us like a magnet to Calvary. We could fight a God who took us by the scruff of the neck and tried to coerce us, who over-awed us with his thunderbolts and frightened us with prophecies of punishment, but what are we going to do with this strange God who hangs on a Cross, this God who treats us with such infinite respect, who divests himself of heavenly glory and meets us on our own level, who comes up to us and says, "I have a great purpose for you, my child. I want you to live a life in my Kingdom, a life in friendship with me, but I shall not force you into it; I shall reveal this life before your eyes. I shall hold it up before you in all its purity and attractiveness. I shall appeal to you from a Cross"?

IV

"I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The Cross *appeals to our sense of moral obligation*. A modern author has written a novel called *Barabbas*⁴ in which he follows

imaginatively the career of that criminal whose name the Jewish mob screamed in preference to that of Jesus. We know almost nothing about Barabbas, but we can believe that he must have been a particularly mean and brutal character. We can see him pacing up and down his dungeon like a caged beast, knowing he must die and determined to die with curses on his lips. Suddenly the cell door swings open. A jailer snarls, "You! Get out! You're free!" and thinking it a dream, Barabbas staggers out into the sunshine wondering what has brought this miracle to pass. He learns very quickly. Apparently there is someone more dangerous and hated than he. He must look at this vicious character whom they have even now crucified on the hill of Golgotha. So Barabbas joins the crowds outside the city wall and for a long time he stares transfixed at this human scapegoat to whom he owes his freedom and his life. Barabbas did not become a Christian, at least not according to this novel, but neither did he return to the old life of brutality and plunder. Barabbas became a wanderer, a man in search of his own soul. Many times in his anguish he wished that he *had* died on that black Friday, because never could he erase from his tortured memory the sight of that innocent man dying in his place.

It would be a dreadfully sobering experience to have someone die for you, and infinitely more sobering if he gave his life voluntarily because he loved you and wanted to make you a better person. One thing is sure: if you have any moral sense at all, your life can never be the same again. Here is a young wastrel who squanders his father's money and brings shame upon his father's good name. Friends whisper, "He is killing his father," and they speak the truth, because the older man has gone gaunt and grey over this terrible disappointment in his son. "I should advise you," warns the doctor, "to wash your hands of him. Your health will not stand it much longer." One day after a violent scene between father and son as a result of the boy's disgraceful behaviour, the father suffers his fatal seizure; the strain on his heart has been too great. And the boy? He moves around in a daze. "I killed him," he sobs,

"I should be the one lying in that coffin. God forgive me, but I didn't know my father loved me so much."

There you have the magnetic appeal of the Cross. Those two beams of wood teach us what no prophet and no philosopher can ever teach us—that God loves us, enough to act in a way that we can understand, a way that stirs our deepest emotions, a way that appeals to our dignity as human beings; and we know that because of what God has done, we can never be the same again. Many a man has stood incredulously before the Cross and cried out, "God has done this thing for me, done it because he loves me and because he wants me as his son. Do I really mean that much to God? Does he love me so desperately as to die for me?"

"And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

An Archbishop of Paris was preaching to a great congregation in Notre Dame. He told the story of three young men, gay, worldly and godless, who wandered into the cathedral one day. Two of them wagered the third that he would not make a bogus confession. He accepted the wager. The priest, who listened, realized what was happening, so when the pretending penitent had finished, he said, "To every confession there is a penance. You see the great Crucifix over there? Go to it, kneel down, and repeat three times as you look up into the face of the Crucified, 'All this you did for me, and I don't care a damn!'" The young man emerged from the confessional box to report what had happened and to claim the wager from his companions. "Oh no," they said, "first complete the penance, and then we will pay the wager." Walking slowly to the great Crucifix, he knelt down and looked up into that

face with its searching eyes of aggrieved love. Then he began, "All this you did for me, and I . . ." He got no further. Tears flooded his eyes. His heart was torn by the pain of repentance. There his old life ended, and there the new began. Finishing his sermon, the Archbishop said, "I was that young man."

CHAPTER THREE

THE JUDGMENT OF THE CROSS

THE civilized world took a significant step forward in the Nuremberg war trials. Mistakes were made, of course, largely for want of precedent, but it surely means something that for the first time in history civilized peoples recognized war for what it is—a crime against humanity and a crime that should be punished. For the first time men reckoned seriously with the whole concept of corporate guilt. Former officers of the Hitler régime were tried and sentenced not for the crimes which they had personally committed, but for the larger and more brutal crimes which they had conceived and directed.

Suppose we brought to a similar trial the men who crucified Jesus. For sheer criminality nothing surpasses that infamous deed committed in Palestine over a twelve-hour period nearly two thousand years ago. The Cross still ranks as one of the grimmest atrocities of the human race. History has judged the men responsible, heaped its contempt upon them and cast them out into the utter darkness of shame and scorn. But what if we could actually bring them to trial, just as we brought the Nazis at Nuremberg, judging them not as individuals but as a group corporately accused of committing a crime against the human race?

I

Our imagination kindles as we think of ourselves in a courtroom. High before us stands a bench, seated upon it the Creator and Judge of the universe, Almighty God. This is *the first of four facts* in our courtroom drama. Let us ponder it for a moment, because men commonly forget this fact. The Nazis

forgot it when they liquidated Jews in gas chambers, as did the Communists when they drenched the soil of Hungary with human blood. This is always the fact about God which people overlook when they argue him out of existence and usurp his sovereignty, taking justice into their own hands and setting themselves up as the final arbiters of right and wrong.

Of course, it has never been a popular concept of God even in the minds of professedly religious people. God as our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, God as our shepherd, our light and our salvation, God as "the regular good guy", "the man upstairs", the kindly co-operative senior partner of Western democracy—that kind of God appeals to us. We believe in him because we can manipulate him. He suits our purposes and gives us what we want. The other picture of God, however, God as unswerving justice and implacable truth, the stern, austere Judge of men and nations, God as a being so perfectly pure and so utterly holy that he can never be deceived or corrupted, never be bribed or tempted into compromise—we are not so sure about that.

Yet have we any choice but to believe in that kind of God if we want to retain a relationship with the Bible? Open its first pages, and what do we find? A God who sets man in a garden, an idyllic existence that remains idyllic only so long as man obeys him. From the smoke-covered heights of Mount Sinai this God of justice articulates his eternal laws; and through the voice of his prophets he pronounces doom upon all nations, including the people of his own choice, if they flout and violate those laws. Even the perfect and final revelation of God as gracious, forgiving love does not obviate his character and function as Judge, for the picture we have of him at the end of the age is of one sitting upon his throne, separating the peoples before him as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, admitting those on his right hand to blessedness and consigning those on his left to perdition.

Daniel Webster once made the famous comment, "If you are going the same way with the lightning, it won't hurt you; but

if not, you had better keep out of the way." Man does not stand alone upon this earth, nor does he make the laws by which the generations rise and fall. Those laws predate man; they existed before he made his comparatively recent *début* on the stage of history; they were written by the Creator into the very constitution of the universe, and he who created them administers them in his own way. Sometimes he administers them slowly. His judgments are not always evident, because history has longer days than our own, and there is a tide more mighty than the evening newspapers. Let him who walks against the lightning take warning, however. God is not mocked. God the Creator is also God the Judge. He sits on that bench in absolute sovereignty, judging this world according to his own laws, and his judgments are inexorable.

II

We turn our gaze from the Bench and look at the Prisoners' Dock. There sit the defendants, a fascinating group, looking like the cast of characters in a Good Friday television drama. In the corner we see Caiaphas, the high priest and official representative of organized religion, the most influential man in first-century Jewry and the private stool-pigeon for the Emperor Caesar Augustus; he looks as self-righteous as ever. Next to him sits Pontius Pilate, that high-blooded Roman who had the misfortune to be Governor of the Province of Judaea during the days of our Lord's earthly ministry; he still appears cynical and dissipated. Then comes the Roman Centurion, not an officer but an N.C.O. in Caesar's army, a tough-looking character, obviously hardened and calloused in the grim business of killing. Finally we notice a typical first-century Jew, an ordinary type with nothing to distinguish him, the sort you would meet at the market-place or outside the city wall watching a crucifixion. No point looking for Judas. He judged himself, sentenced himself, carried out the sentence, and

went, as the Scripture says, "to his own place". These are the defendants—foreign to us, yet not so foreign, for while they wear clothes of the first century, their faces could be the faces of men whom we meet on the streets every day.

Silence falls on the courtroom as the defendants rise to hear the charge laid against them: ". . . did wilfully premeditate and on the morning of Friday . . . in the year of our Lord 29 carry out and execute the murder of one Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

No single one of these defendants would himself plead guilty. Judged only on the basis of his own share in the Calvary episode, he might reasonably plead innocence and in the end be acquitted. But remember: these men are being judged for their corporate guilt. While each is not the whole jig-saw puzzle, yet each fits like a piece into the jig-saw puzzle, and the picture is not complete without him. A murder has been committed, a crime which might never have taken place unless each man now standing in the dock had played his particular part. This becomes clear as the evidence unfolds and we hear defendants and witnesses examined and cross-examined.

Caiaphas, for example, was nowhere near the hill of Golgotha. He simply engineered the whole shameful débâcle. Convinced that Jesus was a menace, a threat to the national security, and, incidentally, to the entrenched interests of the priesthood, Caiaphas contrived to have Jesus arrested, falsely charged, and condemned to be "worthy of death". Nor did Pontius Pilate attend the crucifixion. In fact, having seen through the hypocrisy of the Jews, he washed his hands in a basin of water and declared, "I am innocent of this man's blood"—a dubious claim when we remember that Pilate could, by his authority, have prevented the crucifixion, at peril of his own career, of course. The Centurion who actually crucified Jesus, who commanded the crucifixion detail, had no choice in the matter; for him it was all in a day's duty, the fulfilment of a military order. He symbolizes the unthinking brute force of ancient Rome. The unidentified Jew really had nothing to do

with the crucifixion. He simply stood on the sidelines, a helpless spectator; he heard the mob scream for Barabbas, followed the procession to Golgotha, watched the crucified victims slowly dying under the noonday sun. The sight shook him a bit, but he managed in time to put the whole ghastly business out of his mind.

We ask: Why should these men now stand on trial before the bar of heaven? Granted that their corporate action led to the murder of God's Son, yet their motives are the motives by which men act in every generation. All these forces exist in our common life today; we may deplore them, but we have learned to accept them and live with them. Vested interest! Is that not the motive which fomented industrial strife and cries out in protest when the Church challenges entrenched evils? Moral cowardice! Is that not the motive that permits injustice to go unchecked and formulates policies with an eye to the next election instead of the next generation? Trust in brute force! Is that not the motive that spends astronomical figures on defence, that keeps great bombing planes aloft in training missions consuming in a day enough fuel to warm a small town for a week? Spectatoritis! Is that not the motive that watches a two-and-a-half billion dollar film about man-eating ants that grow to be eight feet tall, and shrugs its shoulders indifferently when millions of children fail to grow at all because they have no food to put in their mouths?

Writing about the Oberammergau Passion Play last year, a Jewish writer in the United States accused it of exaggerating the New Testament references to Jewish responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. He declared that the play was frankly and persistently anti-Semitic. He went on to say that this fact in its local context goes a long way to explain why the Bavarian city of Oberammergau was so dramatically addicted to the Nazi cause and why so many actors who had portrayed Biblical characters found anti-Semitism congenial. The accusation is, of course, preposterous. Had this writer interviewed some of the actors at Oberammergau who represented the characters

responsible for the death of Jesus, he would have found that these devout Christian people before each performance engaged in prayer and besought God's forgiveness for a crime of which all men of all races and all generations stand guilty. There is the *second fact* in our courtroom drama: that not just a collection of first-century characters, but man himself stands on trial before the Divine Tribunal, Man spelled with a capital "M", the original Adam who fell from grace. "Must a Christ perish in every age?" asked George Bernard Shaw; and the answer is "Yes, just so long as men are controlled primarily by their own selfish interests, as long as they remain moral cowards, as long as they put their ultimate trust in weapons of destruction, as long as they can stand idly by and watch other men suffer." These forces crucified the Lord of Glory; they crucify him afresh in every age; they impede his work and choke his influence today; forces that have their origin in your heart and mine.

III

The jury, which is the conscience of mankind, can render only one verdict—guilty! There can be no doubt of that. Taken by himself, any one of these defendants might plead extenuating circumstances, but, taken together, they share equally in the corporate crime committed on Calvary. Nothing can hide the fact that it was a premeditated crime, skilfully engineered and carried out right down to the last detail, to the secret arrest in Gethsemane and the false witnesses at the trial whose perjured evidence convicted Jesus. Nor can anything hide the fact that they put an innocent man on the Cross, knowing his innocence, but executing him because it served their sinister designs. Any-one with anything but a completely distorted vision could see that Jesus of Nazareth, whatever he claimed to be, had done nothing but good during his ministry in Galilee and Judaea. Everything about him proclaimed his innocence and reduced

to utter absurdity the charges of his accusers. That is what makes their crime all the more heinous. Impeachable in any circumstances, it stands out in black hideousness against the white background of the man whom they crucified.

That brings us to the *third fact* in our courtroom drama. The Cross is exactly the place where the sin of man is judged. Apart from the Cross, man may not even know himself a sinner; he may refuse to face the fact of his sin; he may rationalize it and psychologize about it, and in the end convince himself that he is not a sinner at all. At the Cross, however, his pretences crumble and he recognizes himself for the man of sin that he is. The Cross becomes a mirror in which man beholds his own sin in reverse. There against the background of the eternal God become man, man sees himself as the puny, pathetic pygmy of time and space who fancies himself as God. There in the light of the Almighty Lord who took the form of a servant, man sees himself as the conceited creature of earth, who flies to the moon and pretends to lord it over the world. There in the presence of that all-sufficient One who cried out from the depths of most utter helplessness, "My God . . . why hast thou forsaken me?", man sees himself as the incurable egotist who believes that he can stand on his own feet and live life on his own terms. The ancient Greeks had a myth which tells how the Titans, a race of giants, plotted an assault on heaven. This is the crime that stands judged at the Cross, the crime of which men are as guilty today as they were in the year A.D. 29—"Titanism", enmity against God, the destruction of God's only-begotten Son.

This judgment has taken place. It has taken place at the Cross, and any judgment that God may pass now, or in the days to come, or at the end of the age, will be entirely consistent with the judgment he has already passed on Calvary. We look at our world today, a human situation shot through with those same motives of self-interest, moral cowardice, brute force and calloused indifference. We recognize these motives struggling for dominance in our own lives, and we

dare to ask, "What does God think about it?" Well, there can be no question what God thinks about it. Sin is the same whether it flourishes in the first century or the twentieth, in the Communist East or the Christian West, in the mind of a materialist or the soul of a saint. God has said "*No*" to sin; he has rejected it; he has judged it on the Cross.

IV

It now remains only for the Divine Judge to pass sentence. You can feel the tense atmosphere in the courtroom as the defendants rise—and who are these defendants but people like ourselves masquerading in Biblical dress?—to hear the penalty. What is that penalty? Death! Yes, real death, because that which resists God, which lays murderous hands on the only-begotten of God, has written its own obituary. Our politicians need to ponder that truth in their policy-making, so do our militarists in their decisions, our scientists in their experiments, our educators in their curriculum-planning, our artists in their music and painting and our authors in their books. That which is exclusively human will not survive. That which defies God and crucifies Christ has no future, no immortality; it lasts for a day and a night, but it lives only to die.

Having kidnapped Adolf Eichmann, the State of Israel is committing him to trial this summer (1961). Many people argue that Israel has no legal right to try Eichmann, despite the fact that as a Nazi official he engineered the genocide of countless Jews during the war, because Israel as a State did not exist prior to 1948. Assuming that Eichmann is found guilty, however, what sentence will they pass on him? Death? Can even the most ignominious death atone for his unspeakable crimes against the Jewish race? A distinguished Canadian Jew has made the surprising suggestion that, having been tried and found guilty, Eichmann should then be set free. Why? Because not this single man, but humanity itself stands arraigned for

these atrocities and because humanity can never properly atone for allowing a situation to develop in which such atrocities became possible. Set Eichmann free! Would that not be an amazing twist to this dramatic trial on which the eyes of the world are focused?

Not nearly so amazing as *the final fact* of our courtroom drama which now emerges. After passing sentence of death, the Divine Judge does a strange thing. He asks the defendants to vacate the prisoners' dock. Then he removes his robes of office, steps down from the bench, enters the dock himself and stands there to receive the very sentence which he has passed on those convicted of crime. The guilt of Caiaphas, of Pilate, of the Centurion, of the unidentified Jew, your guilt and my guilt, he will take upon himself. Where we should stand, he will stand. He, the Judge, offers himself to be judged in our place.

Does that mean that we have been exonerated? By no means. We are as guilty as we ever were. We are still the men who crucified God's Christ. Our crimes, those same crimes of self-interest, moral cowardice, brute force and calloused indifference, nailed him to the Cross, and for those crimes we stand judged eternally. Nothing within our power, not even the sacrifice of life itself, can atone for that corporate guilt in which we all share. A penalty must be paid, but a penalty so ultimate and so terrible that no one can pay it, no one save God himself—and God does pay that penalty on the Cross. Emil Brunner has expressed this truth powerfully and profoundly:

“In the Cross of Christ God says to man: There is where you ought to be. Jesus, my Son, hangs there in your stead; his tragedy is the tragedy of your life. You are the rebel who should be hanged on the gallows. But lo, I suffer instead of you and because of you, because I love you in spite of what you are. My love for you is so great that I meet you there with my love, there on the Cross. I cannot meet you anywhere else. You must meet me there, by identifying yourself with the One on the Cross. It is by this

identification that I, God, can meet you, man, in him, saying to you what I say to him, 'My beloved Son!' "1

This shakes us to the depths of our being. For the first time, as we behold this incredibly gracious act of God, we begin to realize the awfulness of what we have done to him. If we never treated our sins seriously before, we treat them seriously now, now that we see what it cost God to forgive us our sins. If God, from the heights of that bench, had merely condemned us, we should have remained stubbornly entrenched in our little rationalisms and self-justification. If he had merely said "*No*", we should have appealed his judgment. But now, as this stern and austere Judge comes down to us with infinite sorrow and love, and takes upon himself the whole burden of our guilt, we begin to hear a "*Yes*" contained in his "*No*" and we realize that we have not only broken his laws, we have broken his heart. Our hearts break too, and before a Cross that means forgiveness as well as judgment, we can only cry out in loving surrender, "My Lord and my God!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

"He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the Cross."

(Colossians 2:15)

IN the year A.D. 312 the Emperor Constantine engaged in battle with the army of his opponent, Maxentius. Apparently he knew that Maxentius was relying on pagan magic and he felt the need of a more powerful supernatural force to offset it. Years later he told his friend, Bishop Eusebius, the most eminent of the early Church historians, that just after midday, as he was praying, he looked up and saw in the heavens a cloud formation shaped like a cross and bearing the inscription, "By this sign conquer." Though not yet a Christian himself, Constantine took the Christian Cross as his military standard and under it fought on to victory.

The Cross—a sign of triumph? That is surely strange. To a spectator on Calvary's hill the Cross must have signified anything but triumph. Here, indeed, was a spectacle of defeat; a man pinioned like a helpless animal to an instrument of torture while his enemies leered and jeered in sadistic satisfaction. It was not he, but they who had won the contest. He had failed. Everything he came to do, every brave beginning, every noble purpose seemed crossed out and cancelled by this hated symbol of shame and disgrace. Talk about the scandal of the Cross, yes, or its judgment, but who in his right mind would talk of the Cross in terms of triumph?

"He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the Cross." Think what scene these words of Paul would conjure up in the

minds of those who first read this early Christian epistle. They would think immediately of a Roman conqueror entering the city in triumphal procession. You can visualize the scene, so colourful and exciting. Word has reached Rome of a great military victory. Crowds of cheering citizens, all in a holiday mood, line the city streets as they await the returning army in formal victory parade. Suddenly a shout bursts forth as the procession breaks into view: first, the legions, their spears and helmets glistening in the sun; next, the cavalry, soldiers on sleek, magnificent horses prancing disdainfully; then the chariots, the charioteers themselves staring in proud contempt over the populace; and in the midst of them, riding aloof like a god, the conqueror himself, the general of the victorious army. We can almost hear the crowd shriek their applause as their hero passes by and waves to them patronizingly. Directly behind him march the slaves bearing trophies, the wealth of pillaged colonies and captured nations to be presented as tribute to the Emperor. After the slaves, in disorderly ranks come the chained captives, the prisoners of war, many of them great warriors and high-blooded officers, their shoulders now bent, their faces downcast. These are the true spoils of victory; these the conqueror has defeated and disarmed, and now he makes a public example of them as a sign of his triumph.

Does that describe the procession to Golgotha? Does that description of a conquering military hero fit Jesus carrying his heavy cross to the place of execution? In the mind of Paul it fits perfectly. Paul does not see the Cross as a mere martyrdom or as a contest between a good man and his enemies. Paul sees the Cross as the final battle-ground of the universe, the scene of that last decisive struggle in the cosmic war which has raged from the beginning of creation. And the supreme fact about that battle is that Christ emerged from it triumphant. There on the Cross Christ came to grips with all those grim, demonic forces which threaten man's existence and he turned what seemed like their triumph into uttermost irrevocable defeat. "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of

them, triumphing over them in the Cross." There was victory at the Cross for Christ; you have never begun truly to see the Cross until you have seen that.

I

There was *victory over evil*. Evil did its worst on Good Friday. The legions of Satan, the principalities and powers, the darkest passions of the human heart all mustered on Calvary for their last mighty assault on God's highest and best. We see them marching relentlessly—the guile that twisted evidence against Jesus, the hypocrisy that professed to put this man away for the security of the nation, the vaunted justice that sent the innocent to be scourged in the name of good relations between the rulers and ruled, the cruel hands that thrust the Cross on bleeding shoulders, the ruthless unconcern that drove the nails into his quivering flesh, the light-headedness that flung clever taunts at him, the smirk of satisfaction that distorted the faces of priestly onlookers. Not that this concentration of evil's power, however vile, was unique in itself. What gave it uniqueness was the character of the Crucified. In his guileless presence the enormity of evil was once and for all exposed. Against his unexampled purity the blackness of evil stood out in stark hideousness. In the light of his perfect manhood one saw the loathsome depths to which unredeemed and unregenerate man can fall. Evil did its worst on Calvary.

But evil shot its bolt on Calvary. Even without regard to the theology of the Cross, ask yourself from a purely historical perspective who it was that triumphed on Good Friday—scheming Caiaphas, cowardly Pilate, heartless Herod, cruel Caesar? The only memorial that any of these men will have is a negative memorial. What little immortality they can claim is the immortality of infamy. When those two Protestant bishops, Latimer and Ridley, stood bound to the stake at Oxford with flames licking at their feet, Latimer encouraged

his comrade with the words, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as, I trust, shall never be put out!" On Calvary wicked men mustered all the powers of hell to quench the flame of God's love; instead they released it to sweep over the earth like a prairie fire. Evil did its worst on Calvary; it crucified God's Christ; but it was Christ who triumphed in the end.

There is a dramatic scene in Gounod's opera, *Faust*, where Satan crosses swords with Valentine and, breaking the young man's weapon, is about to run him through. But Valentine in the last second turns his broken sword upside down in the likeness of a cross and Satan stands there paralysed; against this sign he is impotent. After listening one Sunday to a sermon on the Cross of Jesus Christ, a Canadian statesman, a member of the Federal Cabinet, said to his minister, "If the Cross doesn't matter, nothing matters." Well, it surely matters that there is in the world today a force stronger than the forces of evil, a weapon more potent than the sword, a Mighty Conqueror who has once and for all disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the Cross.

Dr. F. W. Dillistone recalls the experience of the British novelist, J. B. Priestley, as he journeyed through England after the war and came to Coventry with its bombed-out cathedral. Priestley describes his visit to the roofless ruin in these words:

"We stepped into light instead of the familiar ecclesiastical dusk. . . . It was very strange, very beautiful . . . not only strange and beautiful but also deeply moving. Feelings I had ceased to credit myself with were now profoundly stirred. Behind the large black cross, made out of charred wood, there had been carved in the stone the two simple words, 'Father, forgive'. That was all, and it was quite enough. If there is a nobler war memorial than this ruined cathedral, one that drives harder at that shell of chicanery, hypocrisy or self-deceit in which we encase our hearts, I have yet to see it. Father, forgive! And outside in the streets they were selling the papers that told the same old story of indifference, drift, mischief, prejudice, passion and blind idiocy."¹

Yes, there is still evil in the world. Mr. Priestley knows it and we know it, but Mr. Priestley, though not a confessedly religious man, looks at the charred cross and the carved words and sees what many orthodox Christians fail to see—that somehow these are related to the fact of evil in the world. Somehow that strange man upon the Cross, speaking words of compassion and forbearance, exposes the shams and follies of human life, and in exposing them begins to heal them. Somehow we know that what happened on Golgotha means that evil as a force in human life has been broken; it may persist, but it persists as a defeated enemy, and it will not have the last word in life and the world. Dr. Dillistone writes, “. . . man’s destiny is not to be eternally at cross-purposes with himself, his world, and his God. Rather, through the One who was willingly stretched upon the Cross, there have come the possibility and the hope of restoration, reconciliation.”²

II

At the Cross there was *victory over suffering*. Suffering did its worst on Calvary, suffering of the body, and of the mind and spirit too. That strange Man upon the Cross seems to represent in his own person the suffering of all humanity. That thought has often passed through my mind as I entered a sick-room in a Roman Catholic hospital and looked at the crucifix on the wall. I said to myself, “The crucifix belongs here, because in suffering men understand the Cross; they meet God where God has met them—in the midst of pain and tears.”

H. H. Farmer tells that many years ago, as a young man, he preached a sermon on the love of God. In the congregation was an old Polish Jew who had been converted to the Christian Faith. After the service he came up to Dr. Farmer and said, “You have no right to speak of the love of God until you have seen, as I have seen, a massacre of Jews in Poland—until you have seen, as I have seen, the blood of your dearest friends

running in the gutters on a grey winter morning." Dr. Farmer asked how it was that, having seen such a massacre, *he* had come to believe in the love of God. The Polish Jew replied, in effect, that the Christian Gospel first began to lay hold of him because it bade him see God, the love of God, just where he would always be in his thoughts and memories—in those blood-stained streets on that grey morning. It bade him see the love of God not somewhere else, but in that very place where love bared its heart to the whole world—in the blood and sweat and agony and tears of Calvary.³

There was an Englishman who said, "I don't know what to believe, but I don't believe all this 'God is love' stuff. I have been in two world wars. I have been unemployed eighteen months on end. I have seen the Missus die of cancer. Now I am waiting for the atom bombs to fall. All that stuff about Jesus is no help." The man is a realist; he comes closer to reality than do a great many professedly pious people. We had better not insult him with glib and facile explanations, telling him that it's all in his mind, or that it's the will of God, or that his suffering is really a blessing in disguise, or that if he keeps a stiff upper lip he can learn to overcome it. He knows differently, does this man, knows very well that taken by themselves, cancer, bereavement, poverty and war are not good, but evil, and that we have not the strength to fight against them, much less to overcome them. Say nothing to such a man. Only point him to the Cross where God in Christ has met and mastered evil. Let him see that on Calvary God once and for all got his hands on suffering in its direst, most defiant form, and turned its most awful triumph into uttermost irrevocable defeat.

Suffering did its worst on Calvary. Not *accidental* suffering, however; we must not identify the Cross with that. Men have misused the term "cross" applying it to all sorts of misfortunes that belong naturally to our condition as human beings—sickness, calamity, sorrow, personality problems. Here is a girl tied down to caring for an invalid mother. Friends refer to this responsibility as "her cross", but that were a wrong

translation of the Gospels. The common burdens and misfortunes become crosses only when we assume them voluntarily, and when we take them up under no compulsion except the compulsion of God's love in Christ. Then our suffering becomes *purposeful* suffering and, as such, it has no power to embitter, or to destroy, or to kill. Christ on Calvary came up against the worst that a good man can suffer voluntarily, and the victory that he won becomes ours by faith.

Waiting on God is the title of the published letters of that remarkable Frenchwoman, Simone Weil, who died during the war at the untimely age of thirty-two. Possessed of an extremely brilliant mind and an intensely devout and dedicated spirit, she chose not to be a member of the Church, but rather to be identified with the world outside the Church and to serve that world as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Despite her delicate health, she left her profession as a teacher from time to time and worked with the labourers in the factories and fields. Assigned to the provisional French Government in London during the war, she refused the extra nourishment ordered by the doctors and kept strictly to the ration to which her compatriots in the occupied zone were limited at that time. Simone Weil suffered much; she suffered voluntarily; she carried a cross. And what does she say about her suffering? Here are some of her last thoughts:

"God's mercy is manifest in affliction as in joy, by the same right; more perhaps, because under this form it has no human analogy. Man's mercy is only shown in giving joy, or maybe in inflicting pain with a view to outward results, bodily healing or education. But it is not the outward results of affliction which bear witness to divine mercy. The outward results of true affliction are nearly always bad. We lie when we try to disguise this. It is in affliction itself that the splendour of God's mercy shines; from its very depths, in the heart of its inconsolable bitterness. If still persevering in our love, we fall to the point where the soul cannot keep back the cry, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'; if we remain at this point without ceasing to

love, we end by touching something which is not affliction, which is not joy; something which is the central essence, necessary and pure; something not of the senses, common to joy and sorrow; something which is the very love of God."⁴

III

At the Cross there was *victory over death*. Death also did its worst on Calvary—not beautiful death, its sadness mitigated by the mortician's skill, but ugly death that revulsed the coarsest mind and turned the strongest stomach. There was a day when men found amusement by going to public executions, and we might have been among them. The Crucifixion of Christ would not have amused us, however. If we had witnessed that sickening spectacle, we should not have been able to sleep for a month, and years afterwards we should have awakened in the middle of the night screaming. Raw, sordid, brutal death at its most decisive and overwhelming worst seemed to triumph that day on Calvary.

But such a short-lived triumph. To be sure, death held the Son of God like an iron vice, but something happened as the vice closed tighter and tighter; suddenly there was a cracking sound, and not the Son of God, but death itself lay broken on the ground. "God raised him up," cried Peter, after weeks of fellowship with the living Lord who had broken death's power, "God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." Something happened to death on Calvary, not just to a man who died, but to death itself, that eternal source of terror, that tyrant over all things created, that last enemy against which mortal man seemed to have no defence.

A film produced during the war showed an attack on an American ship by Japanese planes carrying torpedoes. One of the torpedoes penetrated the side of the ship, but failed to explode, and there it remained lodged while the crew

sweated in panic. Somehow it had to be made harmless. Two men crawled in beside this deadly bit of evil. Their initial job was to unscrew the plating immediately behind the warhead of the torpedo and uncover the delicate mechanism. They managed to unscrew and lift the edge of the plate, but it slipped back. They drew their breaths and tried again, and again it slipped back. A third time they tried, and this time they got the plate wedged up and tilted back, revealing the hidden danger. Like a flash, one of the men slipped a little card just where the needle would fall to work the exploding device. Almost as he did this, the needle fell—but a second too late. The deadly thing was harmless now; its sting had been drawn.

What these men did to the torpedo, Christ on his Cross did to death: he defeated it, devitalized it, and rendered it harmless. There is still such a thing as physical death, of course; our bodies still change and decay, but no longer does death terrorize us because its sting has been drawn and its power to destroy has been broken. The agnostic, Bertrand Russell, might declare categorically, "I believe that when I die, I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive." The sceptic, Thomas Hobbes, might say, "I am going to take a leap in the dark. I commit my body to the worms and my spirit to the Great Perhaps." But listen to the Christian, Paul: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Eugene O'Neill dramatized this truth in his play, *Lazarus Laughed*. He tells how the brother of Mary and Martha, who was raised from the dead by Jesus, left the old home in Bethany and journeyed to Greece. In a square at Athens he meets the half-crazed and utterly cruel Gaius Caligula, who has been chosen by the Emperor Tiberius as his successor. When spies inform Caligula that the people hate him, he retorts, "Let them hate—so long as they fear us! We must keep death dangling before their eyes. . . I like to watch men die." Suddenly this wicked monster is confronted by Lazarus who has the appearance of a "stranger from a far land". Caligula

accuses Lazarus of teaching people to laugh at death and threatens him with execution. But Lazarus looks into his face and laughs softly "like a man in love with God", and answers, "Death is dead, Caligula. Death is dead."⁵

"He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the Cross." Do we really believe that Christ on his Cross actually won a victory over the enemies which we most fear, and that in his victory we can share by faith? A long time after the end of World War II a little pocket of Japanese soldiery was discovered far back in the Philippine mountains. Completely cut off from the world and the news, these men lived for several years unaware that hostilities had ceased, and in fear that their discovery would mean their death. When they were found and plans made for their repatriation, one soldier killed himself in panic. It is a parable of life. Even in the busiest centres of civilization men live today in ignorance of the victory that was won on Calvary. They build camouflages to cover their quaking panic; they doom themselves to servitude and death. To such people the message of the Gospel is this: Come out of hiding! Catch up with the truth of the new situation in the world! In the Cross of Christ God has triumphed over evil, over suffering, over death; and in this sign we too shall conquer.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

"But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

(Galatians 6:14)

PAUL becomes very personal in his angry letter to the Galatians. In vivid detail he describes his conversion experience on the Damascus Road, his credentials as an apostle, his career as a Christian missionary, the sacrifices he has made for Christ. He deliberately builds himself up in the eyes of his readers. Why? For no other reason than to knock himself down. He wants these foolish Galatians to know just how little stock he places in any human component of Christianity. He wants to impress upon them that the glory of the Christian Faith lies not in anything that we can do for God, but in something that God has done for us, something he has done without us and in spite of us. Does a Christian have cause to glory at all? Then let him look away from himself, away from his small service and paltry achievements, away to a Cross "towering o'er the wrecks of time". "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I

We glory in the Cross, because the Cross gives us *a sense of our worth as human beings*. David Karp's significant and frightening novel, *One*, depicting life under a totalitarian régime, concerns a university professor named Burden, who runs afoul of

the authorities, not for any overt disloyalty, but because a routine investigation reveals that he has a sense of his own personal worth. Instead of executing him, however, the state prosecutor decides to make him a guinea pig. He will pulverize the man's soul and destroy his sense of identity altogether. He will prove that the human personality can be scientifically reduced from one to zero. So Burden is imprisoned and subjected to a series of unspeakably horrible physical and psychological tortures from which he emerges a shadow of his former self, having no memories of his past, his name, his family or his profession. He walks out of prison a beaten, timid, little man with the name of Hughes, ready to take a minor post in the civil service and to merge his identity with that of the State.

The most relevant, most healing word that the Church can speak to modern man is one that will restore his individuality and give him back a sense of his dignity and worth as a person. That surely matters in a day when every sphere of thought and action—politics, industry, business, science, culture, and even religion—subordinates the individual and crushes his personality from one to zero. Someone has pointed out these two facts of our time—that on the one hand we have learned to make machines so much like men in their behaviour that they seem almost human, while on the other hand humans are in many respects beginning to act like machines. Sometimes, indeed, we confuse the identity of the two. There is something terribly symbolic of the impersonal nature of our age in the printed sign which hangs in a modern factory beside an intricate and delicate machine. It reads: "*Do not waste the time of this machine.*"

We are not describing a problem peculiar to the machine age. Men have always been so haunted by a sense of insignificance as to stand in danger of losing their own self-respect. There was one man who felt so crushed by what he thought must be an inferiority complex that he went to a psychologist for help. After a long series of tests and treatments, the psychologist reported, "I have good news for you. You do not have a

complex. You *are* inferior." We smile, but with some reserve, because we know that many people would feel that the psychologist has described them exactly. "Nobody loves me; I'm going into the garden to eat worms" is the cry of many a man who feels like a superfluous cipher, useless, unwanted and unloved. Let him drown himself in the River Thames, and no one will even notice that he is not around any more. "Just bury me in the earth," he sighs, "and inscribe on my gravestone, 'Here lies nobody.'"

A man must be loved in order to know his worth as a human being. One of the moving scenes in Dickens' *Christmas Carol* takes place in the shabby home of Bob Cratchit, as he and his family sit down to their meagre Christmas dinner. Could anyone in the old City of London be less significant than this wretched little underpaid clerk, shivering in his tiny office and cringing in terror before his bullying, miserly employer? In the eyes of all society, Bob Cratchit was a nonentity, a superfluous cipher in the scheme of things; he could pass out of the picture tomorrow, and nobody in the world of business, nobody on the streets would be any the wiser. But Bob Cratchit comes to his own home, to his wife, his children, to Tiny Tim, his own little kingdom, and there he exchanges a beggar's rags for the robes of a king. There he becomes somebody, a person loved and respected; there he regains a sense of his worth as a human being.

A man looking down from the top of the Empire State Building in New York, seeing the people like little midges on the pavement one hundred floors below, not as large as insects, said, "That is how the world must look to God." The New Testament, however, gives a different view: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. . . . God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is the glory of the Cross that it gives us a sense of our worth as human beings. We stand on Calvary's hill, and while our hearts break with grief,

they also throb with joy, because on Calvary we come to the one place in the world where we know ourselves loved, wanted and respected. We do not pretend to fathom the mystery of the Cross, but of this we can be certain: the Cross is for us. God suffered there, and he suffered because he loves us. In all its length, breadth, height and depth, the love of God shines forth from the darkness of Calvary.

A group of doctors were working over a victim of poverty picked up as dead and sent to them for surgical experiments. Speaking in Latin, one of them said to his colleagues, "What shall we do with this worthless wretch?" To their surprise, the supposedly dead man opened his eyes and answered in faultless Latin, "Call not him worthless for whom Christ died." That is the final truth about any one of us—that we are men for whom Christ died, and therefore of infinite worth in the sight of God. We may depreciate ourselves, other people may have a low estimate of us—perhaps with good reason, because sometimes we so profane our manhood with dark passions and an evil spirit that nothing beautiful, nothing admirable remains for human eyes to behold. But God loves us despite our unloveliness and he says, "That man is worth something to me. I value him even in his wretched condition, and I want him enough to die for him." That is why we glory in the Cross, because the Cross gives us a sense of our worth as human beings.

II

We glory in the Cross because the Cross restores our *integrity as human beings*. In a magazine article, written anonymously, a woman tells how she attempted to take her own life and failed. A festering sense of guilt had driven her to this insanity. In a moment of unthinking passion, a moment ever to be regretted, she had been unfaithful to her husband, and though she still loved her family devotedly, she felt unworthy, unclean, unfit to be a wife and mother. She lived in a hell of

her own making. After a while she became convinced that her husband knew the terrible secret and that he wanted to be rid of her. So one day she wrote a letter of confession, left the house forever, went down town, took a room on the top floor of the tallest hotel, opened the window and threw herself out. Instead of falling to her death on the pavement, however, she landed on the canvas roof of a parked convertible. Hours later she regained consciousness in the hospital and found herself looking into the steady, sympathetic eyes of a young doctor who obviously knew the whole story. "O God," she moaned, "am I still alive? God forgive me!" The young doctor put his hand on her forehead. "God will forgive you," he said calmly. "Don't worry about anything. We are going to help you learn to love yourself again."

Yet, can we learn to love ourselves again when we have betrayed the love which loves us ultimately? Is it enough to say, as Voltaire said, "Of course God forgives our sins; that is his business"? As human beings we have an innate integrity, and somehow that integrity has to be restored before we can believe the Gospel of God's forgiveness. In his play, *The Cocktail Party*, T. S. Eliot makes Celia Copplestone say, in her confession to the psychiatrist:

"It's not the feeling of anything I've ever *done*
Which I might get away from, or of anything in me
I could get rid of—but of emptiness, of failure
Toward someone, or something, outside of myself;
And I feel I must . . . *atone*—is that the word?"¹

Yes, that is exactly the word. The sense of moral failure has no solution in human terms. Any man who is a man is too proud to forgive himself, or even to accept God's forgiveness if it offends his sense of justice. The essence of sin's guilt is that we know ourselves alienated from God, at enmity against God; we have lost our standing before him, and only as we regain that standing shall we regain our integrity as human beings.

It is the glory of the Cross that Christ in his death has made it possible for us, even in our unworthiness, to stand before God. Where we could not atone, he has atoned and opened for us a new and living way into God's presence. We cannot fully understand this mystery, and perhaps the plain man has no wish to get bogged down in the archaic terminology of the Jewish sacrificial system; but we cannot escape the conviction of the New Testament that what Christ did on the Cross, he did for us, in our place. "It was for us he hung and suffered there." "He is the propitiation for our sins." "He bore our sin in his own body on the tree." He has done this thing, and because he has done it, there is no need for us to do it. Not by our own efforts to atone, but by faith in God's act of atonement we shall regain our standing in the presence of the Most High.

In one of his books, F. W. Dillistone describes an unfamiliar painting of Holman Hunt called "The Scapegoat". It recalls the Jewish Day of Atonement ceremonies as prescribed in the Book of Leviticus, where the priest takes a goat and over the head of this helpless animal confesses all the sins and transgressions of Israel, and then drives it out into the wilderness. We see that wilderness in Holman Hunt's painting. In the background there is a chain of mountains. From the foot of the mountains stretch the waters of the Dead Sea reflecting a storm cloud overhead. Everything suggests barrenness and a curse. And then at the very centre of this desolation there stands the unutterably pathetic creature, the scapegoat, gasping out its last breath and symbolizing the curse unspeakable, the intolerable weight, and the agonized sin-bearing of all the dull, weary and evil world. "It would be foolish," writes Dr. Dillistone, "to imagine that a single picture could fully express the mystery of the atoning work of Christ. Yet few symbols could express more powerfully the overwhelming weight of the burden that the Redeemer of mankind bore upon his heart."²

Pilgrim's Progress dramatizes this truth. Christian leaves the

City of Destruction and gains admittance at the Wicket-Gate, but he carries a heavy burden on his back, pressing him down and making his journey arduous. At length he comes to a hill, "and upon that place," to quote Bunyan, "stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, the burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and continued to do so till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more." Then you remember Christian's paeon of praise,

"Blessed cross! Blessed sepulchre! Blessed rather be
The man who there was put to shame for me."

This has been the experience of countless souls. The assurance of forgiveness, the sense of inexpressible release, the overwhelming gratitude to the Crucified—all of these are what men feel when they have knelt before the Cross. And this is the glory of the Cross; it restores our integrity as human beings and makes it right for us to stand before God.

III

We glory in the Cross because the Cross gives us the *strength to live like human beings*. What a strange paradox besets our civilization today. On the one hand, through the miracles of science we possess unprecedented and seemingly unlimited power over the world outside us; on the other hand, we are completely at the mercy of the world within. Someone has called us "nuclear giants and ethical infants". We have smashed the atom and made not the slightest impact on the iron curtain. We have harnessed the lightning and failed to harness the uncontrollable passions of the human heart. We have pushed back the frontiers of outer space and left virtually unexplored the vast regions of man's misery on earth. Physically strong men

and moral weaklings—tragically enough that describes our generation.

The paradox emerges even more sharply in our personal lives. According to the psychologists there are certain dreams common to all people. Everyone has dreamed of himself being chased by an enemy, only to find that his legs weighed a ton; he wants to run, but he cannot; desperately he lunges forward, but he remains rooted to the ground. Perhaps the dream has a spiritual significance. Before us we see life as God designed it, life as exemplified by the saints of all the ages and supremely revealed in Jesus Christ. We see a life of adequacy where we shall know ourselves equal to struggles and perplexities; we see a life of serenity and poise, without discouragement over the present and fear about the future; we see a life of victory where we shall grapple with the enemies of our souls and come off more than conquerors; we see a life of significance and purpose where our common days shall count for something worthwhile; we see a life of harmony and peace with the known that surrounds us and with the unknown that is above and beyond us. We see that life and we struggle toward it, but the more desperately we struggle, the more frustrated we become. That is just the paradox. We have the will to move forward, but we cannot translate our will into action. We are weak, impotent; we need a sense of release and freedom and power from beyond ourselves.

It is the glory of the Cross that Christ in his death has made such power available for our lives and for our world. If the Cross restores our worth and our integrity as human beings, so does it give us strength to live like human beings. The Cross is the power of God unto salvation. Think for a moment about the awesome, unlimited power of Almighty God: not of the atom, but of him who made the atom; not of the lightning, but of him who created lightning; not of the moon rocket, but of him who holds the planets in their orbit. Suppose that power itself, not man-made energy, but ultimate power, could be made available to us in the moral and social struggle. Suppose

in some miraculous way the inexpressible majesty and inexhaustible might of God could be transformed into human terms and made relevant to our life. In a land where water power is abundant, the countryside is dotted with giant pylons that carry electricity from the stations where it is generated to the cities for use. But the high tension wires carry a voltage far too great to be harnessed to our humble necessities. Before it can be used to light our homes, clean our carpets, wash our clothes, toast our bread, it must be transformed into a voltage suitable for the normal uses of human life. That is how men have viewed the Cross—as God's great Transformer, that perfect meeting-place of man with God through which the power of God is brought down to our terms and made accessible to our faith.

Once a minister was called to baptize a dying boy. Standing at the bedside, he reverently went through the ritual of his Church and administered the sacrament "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". As he left, the boy's aunt said to him, "We believe that a blood transfusion might save him." The minister arranged for it immediately, and, before long, the boy's face and fingers began to show signs of colour. In time he recovered completely. On the next Communion Sunday the minister noticed the lad in the congregation, and as he pronounced the words, "This is my Body . . . this is my Blood," he saw what he had never seen before—that blood is life. The boy would have died without it.

Again we come face to face with a mystery, and how shall we describe it except by saying that the Cross is God's blood transfusion for a sick humanity; the body broken and blood shed on Calvary are the very life of God which he has given for the life of the world? In all our weakness, our impotence, our futility, we come to those two beams of wood set against the background of an eastern sky, and as we kneel there looking up into the face of the Crucified, we feel his limitless strength surging into the bloodstream of our souls, and somehow we know that what we cannot do, he, by his power, can do in and

through us insofar as we yield ourselves to him in faith. That is the glory of the Cross—that it releases the power of God into our lives and so gives us the strength to live like human beings.

“But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” This is not theology, but life. This was a man’s testimony, a man who did glory in the Cross, who could stand before Calvary and say, “I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” The Cross was all of that to Paul, and so it can be to us, if we kneel before it in trust and surrender.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CROSS

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

(St. Mark 8:34)

JESUS of Nazareth never hid his scars to win a disciple. He knew the greatness of his task, and he knew that if it required that the Son of God should be crucified, such sacrifice would also be necessary on the part of his disciples. We see him now on the road to Caesarea Philippi, where he reveals to his intimate friends the transcendent truth which all along they have suspected—that he is the Promised One, the Messiah of Israel; but even as their heads spin with grandiose visions, he explodes a bombshell in their midst: "Yes, but not the kind of Messiah that you have been expecting, not an earthly potentate of great power and glory, but a meek, despised, suffering Messiah, who must walk the way of a Cross . . . I am going to be crucified. Do you understand? I am going to die. This is the way my work must be done, and this is the way it will have to be carried on. If you want to have a share in that work, if you want to have any relationship with me at all and live within the circle of my friends and followers, then you must take my cross, this principle of sacrificial love, and make it the central, controlling principle of your life. . . . If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

The time has come to put the Cross back into Christianity. Far too many people, some of them in pulpits, have been busy preaching Christianity without the Cross. A magazine article published not long ago reports a poll of five thousand churchgoers

who were asked to list their preferences in sermon subjects. Here are some of the favourites: "How Can Religion Eliminate Worry and Tension?" "Happy Families Through Religion!" "How to Take Religion into My Business Life!" "Making Prayer More Effective"—important matters, all of them, and all certainly involved in religious faith, but all appealing to the same "what-can-I-get-out-of-religion" motive, and indicating surely that many people regard religion as a kind of spiritual soporific which should deaden the shocks of life and make them more comfortable. Helpful as it may be, it is still the exact opposite of what Jesus taught, namely, that Christianity is not a sedative, but a stimulant; rather than eliminating tension, it creates tension; instead of removing agony from life, it puts agony into life; far from pouring oil on troubled waters, it brews up a gale in the souls of men.

In the preface to one of his books, the Roman Catholic bishop, Fulton J. Sheen, makes a startling observation. He says that the very issue bifurcating the world today and throwing up an "iron curtain" between East and West is the issue of Christ and his Cross. On the one side we have Christianity, but a quasi-secular Christianity that wants Christ without the Cross, a sentimental Christ who makes no hard demands on his followers and does not expect them to be crucified with him. On the other side, we have Communism which does not want Christ, but wants the Cross, an iron cross which crucifies men and compels them to deny themselves and surrender their lives to the higher glory of the State. The one wants religion without sacrifice, the other wants sacrifice without religion, and both are equally wrong and utterly impossible.

The Church will never recover its ancient power until we do pay heed to the New Testament and restore the Cross to its central place in our Faith. Someone has said, "The most fascinating thing in Christianity has always been the Cross. Why? Because in the long run men do not respect a cheap and easy religion. They respect a commanding, challenging religion that will take all they can give and then call for more."

Pink-pill Christianity may appeal to semi-neurotics, but the only Christianity capable of capturing the imagination and loyalty of intelligent, red-blooded men is a Christianity with the Cross at its heart and centre. What was it indeed that sent the apostles out in the face of bitter and bloody persecution to turn a hostile, pagan world upside down; that sent Paul on his journeys and took martyrs into the Roman Colosseum; that inspired the Reformers and sent missionaries to the far corners of the earth? Not a popular preacher telling them to relax, but a lonely Man treading the dark road to Calvary, and saying to a handful of disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

At a conference of Christian laymen, somebody asked one delegate, a busy and prominent man of affairs, how he had become so involved in the life of the Church. He replied, "Well, for years I didn't take the Church seriously because it seemed to demand nothing of me. I thought that religion was something for women and children. I had no time for it. Then I came, or better say I was dragged, to one of these conferences, and here I met men who are busier and more important than I am. They have time for religion; they make time for it. And I began to see that promoting the cause of Christ in the world is a man-sized job. It challenged me, and I took up the challenge."

Let us understand that in calling men to a Cross, the Master was not enunciating, but articulating, a fundamental law of life, a law which, according to the scientists, can be found at every level of the story of nature. Canon C. E. Raven tells that a great biologist, who wrote extensively about insects and who recorded some very ghoulish and horrible things which the insect world does and suffers, confessed to a friend that though he considered himself a hard-boiled sceptic, yet the more fully he studied the world of nature, the more convinced he became that it was obeying first and last what he could only call a sublime law of sacrifice. He went on to say that there seemed to be a "cross-pattern" woven into the very stuff and substance

of the whole evolution and history of life on this planet.¹ Did not Jesus illustrate the significance of his own sacrifice by pointing to a law of nature, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"? At the source of every new creation, be it in the physical realm or in the realm of the spirit, there has to be a death of some kind, a principle of sacrifice, a cross.

Certainly the Cross stands as the symbol of a way of redemption for society. The German philosopher, Hegel, by no means a convinced Christian, made this observation in his *Philosophy of History*, "We may affirm absolutely that nothing great in this world has been accomplished without passion." A modern voice, that of Reinhold Niebuhr, expresses the same truth in Christian terms, "The Kingdom of God must still enter the world by way of the Crucifixion." That the world has not thus far chosen this way of love and sacrifice, but has trusted rather in wisdom and power, is tragically evident in the catastrophic events of the past fifty years. How can it be otherwise? we hasten to protest. We know very well what it would imply if our society renounced its power structures and walked the way of a Cross. We look at Jesus and we see that for him it meant dying for wicked men instead of fighting them, complete capitulation to the forces of evil, absolute faith in the sovereignty and ultimate victory of Almighty God. Suppose that Christian peoples really decided to follow Jesus—even to his Cross? Suppose this principle of love and trust and sacrifice were to control the reaction of South Africa to its racial dilemma, the policy of Britain and the United States toward their defence budgets, and the attitude of the Western Powers as they try to negotiate with men of different faiths and ideologies? Everything in our reason, our conscience, and our history revolts against such suicide—President Kennedy has said in his Inaugural that we must not tempt our enemies—yet it still remains true that the Cross is God's way for us, the only way of redeeming our common life, and the only vital breath of a regenerated social order.

The Church's life should be spent under the sign of the Cross. When Jesus called his followers to a life of lowliness and self-abnegation, he spoke not only to Christian individuals, but to the Christian community. If the Church is to be the body of Christ, the place of his presence and his arm of salvation, then the Church must live and die for the world, just as Christ lived and died for the world; its life is to be forever spent like a grain of wheat. Of course, the Church would face some rather shattering implications if ever it took seriously the principle of the Cross and walked with its Lord the path of self-denial and sacrifice, choosing, as he did, to give up its life for humanity. Giving up life is just about the farthest thing from the mind of any Church in the world today. Rather, the consuming ambition of each religious body is to preserve its identity, strengthen its walls, consolidate its interests and extend its influence. This is true of a local congregation and it is true of every communion from the smallest sect in the mid-western United States to that mighty monolith which has its headquarters in Rome. Did Christ intend, however, that the Church should be supremely dedicated to its own self-preservation? Christ did not come to establish a Church, but to establish a Kingdom. The Church points to that Kingdom, prays for that Kingdom, preaches that Kingdom and works for that Kingdom, but the Church in history is not itself that Kingdom. Christ did not intend that his Church as a visible organization should live forever. The Church lives to die, to love and labour and suffer, until its existence becomes no longer necessary because men everywhere shall accept Christ as Saviour and worship him as Lord.

Stanley Jones once said, "All my life I have borne a cross. Recently that cross was lifted. Now I find myself praying for another cross, because my cross has made me what I am today." There are many people who can bear the same radiant testimony. For them life has plumbed the depths of reality and scaled the heights of character and achieved its richest meaning, not in the sunlight, but in the shadows, not in comfort and ease, but in hardship and pain. Yet we must understand that a

cross, in the Christian sense, is not some inescapable burden which belongs naturally to our condition as human beings, not something to be prayed for and passively accepted, but some duty, some sacrifice to be taken up freely and under no compulsion except the compulsion of God's love in Christ. When Jesus commanded his followers to take up their cross, he was telling them that if they would live in fellowship with him, if they would continue his saving ministry upon earth, they must consciously and voluntarily accept his principle of sacrificial love and make it the controlling principle of their lives.

One of the more doubtful procedures followed by some churches in selecting overseas missionaries is to have them interviewed by a psychiatrist—which might prove a good idea if the psychiatrist is himself a Christian who knows how the mind of a Christian operates. One very sane applicant was rejected for this reason. When asked, "Do you want to return to Korea?" he quite honestly replied, "No!" So the psychiatrist wrote on his report, "The man obviously not suited for this assignment." But as the rejected applicant said afterwards, "Who in his right mind would actually *want* to live in Korea today?" Would you? Would you like to exchange that suburban home of yours in a Christian land of comfort and security for a bamboo hut set in the midst of primitive ignorance? The psychiatrist should have asked himself that question. From the overseas missionary we learn what it means to take up a cross—a responsibility, a burden, a sacrifice, on behalf of people who perhaps neither want nor appreciate us, not because we wish to take it up, but because we *choose* to take it up in obedience to Jesus Christ.

Many years ago Joseph Hocking wrote a powerful novel called *The Trampled Cross*. It was the story of a British soldier fighting in the desert, who fell into the hands of Arabs. They were about to hack him to pieces when the Arab chieftain thought of something more satanic. On the sand at their feet he placed two sticks in the form of a cross, and then said to the young officer, "There is the symbol of your Faith. Trample

on it, and we shall let you go free." Today men do exactly that with the Cross; they repudiate it, they ridicule it, they trample it underfoot as a thing of scorn and superstition. Why, then, should we take it up? Why should our lives and all of life be controlled by a principle of sacrificial love when everything in the world discourages that principle? The answer, of course, is that we shall not find our incentive in the world. Only in one place does a Christian find inspiration and courage to take up his cross, and that place is Calvary where he stands before *the* Cross and catches a vision of the Lord of Glory dying for him. We have tried to catch that vision. We have thought of the Cross in terms of love and forgiveness and reconciliation and victory and new-found sources of moral power; and we have every right to do so, for behind all such thought there is not only the explicit teaching of the New Testament, but the radiant, transformed lives of Christian men and women in every generation. Now we must face the other side of the truth, however; that the death of Jesus means not only that something amazing and wonderful has been done for us; it means that something demanding and exacting is expected of us. Christ on his Cross challenges us and he challenges our world, and we cannot linger in the presence of the Crucified without being moved and inspired to take up that challenge.

Do you know what was the greatest ambition in the life of the Apostle Paul? Paul was a preacher—it was logical, therefore, that he should covet crowds to applaud his eloquence; a theologian—he might wish to be renowned as an expositor of divine truth; a missionary—looking carefully, perhaps, at the record of his converts; an administrator—anxious to keep the wheels of ecclesiastical machinery in motion. All the normal, worldly ambitions, but do you know what the Apostle called them? Garbage! Alongside his real ambition—garbage! Thus he wrote to the church at Philippi from his prison cell. "I count them but refuse that I may win Christ, and be found in him . . . that I may know him, and the power of his

resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death"; and again to the Colossians, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church." That was Paul's supreme ambition—to share in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, to be crucified with him, to die daily with him, to supplement the agony of the Cross. So far as Paul was concerned, you simply could not enter into spiritual fellowship with the ascended Lord unless you bore on your body the marks of his living and dying here on earth. To share his glory, you must also share his passion.

In a famous chapel in a European village there hangs a much celebrated picture of Christ on his Cross. It seems that the artist had known himself redeemed by Christ from a life of sin and folly, so that when he came to paint a likeness of his Lord, his soul was filled with tenderest love and he painted love into every lineament as few artists have done. At the base of the picture he wrote these words as though spoken by Christ,

"All this I did for thee,
What hast thou done for me?"

One summer afternoon in the early eighteenth century, there strolled into the church a young German nobleman, Nicholas Ludwig, Count of Zinzendorf. Loitering along the aisle, he suddenly noticed the painting and became fascinated by it. He saw love in the pierced hands, love in the bleeding brow, love in the wounded side. Slowly he scanned the couplet, "All this I did for thee, what hast thou done for me?" and a new revelation began to dawn upon him. All afternoon he gazed at that picture, and as the rays of the setting sun slanted through the windows, they fell on the bowed form of Count Zinzendorf, weeping and sobbing his dedication to the Christ whose love had not only saved his soul, but conquered his heart. The Cross had challenged him. It sent him out from that chapel to do his mighty life-work which circled the earth with a fraternity of

redeemed men and women, their devotion expressed in some of the great hymns which Zinzendorf himself wrote and which we sing today.

“Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
’Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”

There is an old superstition to the effect that one cannot safely die until one has taken a stick and marked the earth with the sign of a cross. Superstition or not, it contains a profoundly important truth—that somewhere on earth our lives ought to make the sign of a cross, else we shall not safely live or safely die. Jesus said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” How manfully honest of Jesus! How plain and frank he always was! Our Lord never pretended that we shall find life in any other way than by losing it. He left no doubt that only a life with the Cross at its centre can be radiantly and vitally Christian. Only a life controlled by the Master’s principle of sacrificial love can become a part of that larger life which he carried unbroken through death into eternity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PARADOX OF THE CROSS

IN 1960 the motion picture industry did great service to Christianity by its epic production of Lew Wallace's novel, *Ben Hur*. Not often these days can a popular film be recommended to Christian people, especially in a book devoted to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Least of all can we speak favourably of those Biblical extravaganzas which for the most part do disservice to the cause of Christ by their crude theology and their shameless exploitation of religious sentiment. But *Ben Hur* stands in a class all by itself. It is a powerful performance; from beginning to end it has you gripping the arms of your seat; and you feel that Academy Awards were small enough recognition for this brilliant blending of two stories, one fictional and one historical, neither doing violence to the other.

Intentionally or not, the producers of this great motion picture, perhaps by sheer accident, have conveyed a message of profound religious importance. *Ben Hur* comes closer than any similar dramatic presentation to recreating not only the unembellished story of the Christ, but also the authentic situation into which he came, and, beyond that, the significance of his coming. The Crucifixion scene is unsurpassable. For the first time you see dramatized before your eyes the injustice, the callousness, the brutality and the horror of this most infamous event in human history. You can hear the crunching of bone as the executioner pounds huge spikes through quivering hands and feet; you can see the rivulets of blood trickling down the side of the Cross; you can read on the faces of the disciples the bewilderment and disillusionment that he who had claimed to be God's Messiah should die like a common criminal. All nature seems to shout its protest in the crashes of thunder and

lightning that tear open the sky; and as the deluge of rain floods the gutters, rain mingled with blood, flowing out, as it were, with life-giving power to the whole world, you begin to understand the meaning of such lines as these:

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

As the angry storm subsides, it does not tax our credulity that two leper women cowering in a cave should suddenly look at each other’s hands and faces, and discover that they have been healed of this loathsome and deadly disease. We expect miracles in the aftermath of Golgotha. For here is the paradox of the Cross—that out of destruction should come healing; that these two things, diametrically opposite, should be part of the same reality. This remarkable insight fairly obsessed the Apostle Paul. Again and again he comes back to it in his letters. To Paul, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the paradox *par excellence*, the greatest turning of the tables, the vastest confounding of human expectation of all times.

Look closely at Calvary and at him who hangs there. What words describe this tragic figure? The word “foolishness”, perhaps, for here was surely the craziest gamble a man ever took—flinging his life down in faith that love and not force will win the hearts of proud and selfish men. Certainly the word “weakness”, for can anyone be so catastrophically weak as a man hanging from a gibbet with remorseless enemies spitting and flinging taunts in his face? “Suffering”—there is another word, sorrow beyond compare, pain of body and anguish of soul. “Death”—the vocabulary ends there; nothing comes after that. Or does it? Here is the paradox—that out of all these things came their exact opposites. Out of what seemed like the folly of Jesus, God brought the only wisdom that prevents the human race from crawling back into the geological slime whence

it arose. Out of the weakness of Jesus, God brought the one source of strength that changes men from bad to good and gives them power over their own destructive passions. Out of the suffering of Jesus, God brought comfort, making the Cross the one place in the world where the sinful find forgiveness, the sorrowful solace and the hard-pressed courage. Out of the death of Jesus, God brought life, life that conquered death as a strong man slays his enemy, life eternal and everlasting.

The Oxford Dictionary defines a paradox as "a seemingly absurd statement". We need a more positive definition than that, however. A paradox is a combination of two contradictory statements, neither of which makes any sense without the other; and a paradoxical situation is one where two factors—they may be a husband and wife—cannot live together, yet cannot live without each other. You understand, then, why Paul considered the Cross with its unique combination of opposites, its amazing interchange of qualities, as the supreme paradox of history. He comes back to it in many of his writings, but it forms the theme, one might say the "key-idea", of his Second Letter to the Corinthians.¹ Nor does Paul confine it to the life and destiny of Christ. This is the strange paradox of the Christian life, that a man who by faith becomes a man in Christ, a partaker of Christ's nature, should share, in his own person and in his Christian relationships, this same divinely-ordained contradiction. The true Christian is a walking paradox; he has within himself at one and the same time both foolishness and wisdom, weakness and strength, suffering and comfort, life and death; and in his relations to other people this same interchange of qualities takes place; out of his folly, his weakness, his suffering and his death, come wisdom, strength, comfort and life.

Look more closely at this strange paradox of the Christian life, especially as Paul in Second Corinthians illustrates it from his own experience. We can begin with the interchange of *foolishness and wisdom*. It seems that there were troublemakers in Corinth, malicious men with a lust for power, who did not

hesitate to take advantage of Paul's absence to defame him and spread ugly rumours about him behind his back. It cut Paul deeply that the gullible Corinthians should be duped by these "superlative apostles"; he could feel their coldness and mistrust, and it stabbed him like a sword. What a fool he had been to spend himself sacrificially for such stubborn and ungrateful people! In a burst of sarcasm he tells them so. "I have been a fool! You forced me to it!"; and then he throws in their faces that incredible catalogue of beatings, imprisonments, shipwreck, hunger, thirst, exposure and treachery which he has suffered on their behalf for the sake of Christ. This was the Apostle's foolishness. "I am speaking as a fool," he cries. But a wise foolishness, because it is the foolishness of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ, and "the foolishness of God," writes Paul, "is wiser than the wisdom of men."

Think, indeed, of the men in history who have made themselves fools for the sake of Christ. The list is an imposing one. Reaching down from the apostles and Paul himself, it includes such figures as Francis of Assisi, Savonarola, Martin Luther, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Toyohiko Kagawa. All of these were dubbed fools in their own day. Why? Because, like their Lord, they renounced the rewards and securities that the world offers to all who will sensibly accommodate themselves to its imperfection and evil, and instead they threw down their lives in faith that love, and not force, will win the hearts of proud and selfish men. Whom the fathers persecuted, however, the children have canonized, and what seemed foolishness to their own generations has been hailed by later generations as the supreme wisdom.

In terms of material standards who in the world today appears a bigger fool than Albert Schweitzer? We think of this philosopher, theologian and musician, qualifying himself as a missionary doctor at the age of thirty, and burying himself for a lifetime in French Equatorial Africa. We think of his jungle hospital at Lambaréné, a primitive institution with not very much of the equipment or sanitary conveniences which we

in this country count basic to the practice of medicine and surgery. We think of this colossal genius enduring privation—composing music on a broken-down piano, writing his books on the back of old requisition sheets, shaving without soap or lather—denying himself every comfort and luxury in order to save money for hospital supplies, and sacrificing his whole life for ignorant people, many of whom neither trust nor appreciate him. Foolishness? So the worldling would describe it, yet we know that such foolishness offers more hope for the salvation of Africa than do obsolescent policies of “apartheid” enforced by barbed wire fences and soldiers with guns in their hands. History, soon to be written, will render its verdict on the true path of wisdom in reconciling those human differences that keep the world on the brink of chaos.

Paul further shows us the interchange of *weakness and strength* in the Christian life. How ashamed we are of our weaknesses, and how pathetically we try to conceal them! “Put a *No Visitors* sign on the door,” cried one patient at the hospital; “I don’t want my friends to see me in this disgustingly weakened condition!” Paul takes a different view. “If I must boast,” he says, “I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” He writes of a “thorn in the flesh”, “a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated”. Scholars have conjectured about the nature of this physical disability. Some have suggested epilepsy, others blindness. We can be sure that it was one of those nagging ailments, “a sharp pain”, as the *New English Bible* translates it, not serious enough to immobilize him, but distressing enough to impede him, and certainly beyond cure, so that he had no choice but to live with it. Three times Paul besought God to remove this thorn from his flesh, but God only replied, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Here is the paradox—that when a man is weak, he is really strong, because then all his own defences are down, and the strength of God has free access into his soul and body. Sometimes we have to be helpless in order that God can help us. “I will the more gladly

boast of my weaknesses," declared Paul, "that the power of God may rest upon me."

This has been the triumphant testimony of many Christians whose lives have reproduced the strange paradox of the Cross. Something has happened, some cruel misfortune or tragedy to deprive them of their health or freedom, and where they might have served God in all the resilience of physical strength and power, they now lie chained, helpless and weak like a beast in captivity. Bitterly they beat the bars of their cage. Angrily they curse their frustration. Yet the astonishing thing is that God works through their helplessness to accomplish what he could never have accomplished through them at the height of their powers. It is in their weakness that they achieve their true strength and become of greatest use to God, so that instead of cursing it forever, they make it their boast in the Lord.

Mary Verghese is an Indian girl who qualified as an orthopedic surgeon at Vellore Christian Medical College in 1951. Two years later an automobile accident crippled her for life. Doctors had to break the tragic news that not only would she never walk again, but that from her arms downward she would never feel again and never move again. All she had left was her head and her two arms. It was a bitter blow for this brilliant girl who had dedicated all her skills and power to the healing ministry of Christ, yet she believed that Christ still had a purpose for her life, and despite every warning to the contrary, she expressed calm faith that Christ would bring her into full medical work again. She became interested in leprosy patients, because at that time a French surgeon had perfected a technique for grafting tendons and transforming the wasted stumps of lepers into something like hands and feet. At her own insistence, Dr. Mary underwent three long operations which resulted in her being able to sit upright in a wheelchair. Then she began to specialize all over again. Today she is reckoned to be one of the most skilful surgeons in the East. In the operating room at Vellore you will find her doing hand reconstructions, foot reconstructions and face reconstructions,

the kind of surgery that can be performed from a wheelchair, and the kind of surgery she would never have qualified herself to perform had this cruel tragedy not deprived her of her normal strength. You will also see the new light that comes from the faces of her patients as they watch her moving among their beds, someone more paralysed than they will ever be, someone who is only partially alive, who will never be any better physically, and yet whose very weakness has become such a marvellous channel for the strong healing hand of Christ.

Then Paul shows us the interchange of *suffering and comfort*: in his own person, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too"; and in his relationship to the Corinthians, "If we are afflicted it is for your comfort and salvation." Perhaps more remarkable is the sight of this paradox in the little group of Macedonian Churches at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Christians living behind the Iron Curtain today tell us a story that enables us to visualize the sufferings of these little churches in the Roman Empire. We see them as tiny islands of faith in a sea of paganism, persecuted, sometimes by force, but more often by economic and psychological pressure, their members discriminated against and bled white by excessive taxation. The churches in Macedonia had really been up against it, but strangely enough, like many of our contemporary Christian brethren in communist countries, they rejoiced in their affliction and their joy found expression in the most amazing kindness toward those less fortunate than themselves. Paul writes, "In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part." The paradox again—that the man in Christ should have these conflicting experiences in his own person at one and the same time; that his despair should be a comforted despair; that he should suffer, and his suffering overflow in comfort to others.

Have you not noticed that the great sufferers are rarely ever the great complainers? It is the small afflictions, the petty

irritations, that plunge us into a mood of self-pity, so that we whimper and whine and spread our sense of misery about us like a fog. Men who experience great tragedy and who lose the things in life that are most precious to them, especially if their suffering is a purposeful suffering voluntarily accepted in obedience to Christ, seem to rise above the normal negative reaction to adversity. Such men develop a serenity of spirit, a poise and calmness that communicate themselves as a stabilizing and sympathizing influence to all whose lives they touch. They seem to possess suffering and comfort within themselves at one and the same time; a well of comfort to which we instinctively turn and from which we drink deeply when the desert winds of pain and sorrow and disaster sweep through our souls and leave them parched. Such men can say with Paul: "we are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

One of the most moving scenes in all English literature comes at the close of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. The carts were rumbling through the thronged streets of Paris to the guillotine. In one of them were two prisoners, a brave man who had lost his life, but had found it again and was now laying it down for a friend, and beside him a girl, little more than a child. In the prison she had observed the calmness of his face and said to him, "If I may ride with you, will you let me hold your hand? I am not afraid, but I am very small, and it will give me courage." So when they rode, together now, her hand was in his, and even as they reached the place of execution, there was now no longer any fear in her eyes. She looked up into the strong face of the man beside her and said, "I think you were sent to me by heaven."

The paradox of the Cross shines most clearly in that chapter where Paul points up the dramatic interchange of *death and life*. He has been describing the Gospel as a treasure entrusted

to us by God, but "we have this treasure", he says, "in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." Then follow the unforgettable lines that show how vulnerable and perishable this earthen vessel is: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."

Here is the strangest paradox of all, the ultimate in co-existence, infinitely more miraculous than freedom and totalitarianism living side by side in the same world—that these two opposites, death and life, should co-exist in the same person. Not death itself, however, or life itself, but the death of Jesus and the life of Jesus. This idea is basic to all the Apostle's writings. To Paul, Jesus in his earthly manhood was not just an historic personality; he was a second Adam, a new progenitor of the human race, the representative of a recreated humanity. What happened to him happens to us insofar as we belong to him by faith. As Christ died and rose from the dead, so his death and resurrection take place in us. We die with him and with him we rise from the dead. His death becomes life in us, and his death in us becomes life for other people. "So death," writes Paul, "is at work in us, but life in you."

Of the saints and martyrs it is often true that they accomplished more by dying for people than by living for them. Their death broke down barriers and released the floodwaters of new life into countless souls. When John Brown and his little band of abolitionists launched their suicide attack on Harper's Ferry, they knew that the attempt would fail, yet John Brown believed that even if he were executed, his soul would go marching on and his death advance the cause of Christ. He was right. The Harper's Ferry incident struck a mortal blow at slavery in the United States, and out of John Brown's death came the beginnings of new life for a whole race of people. Upon the death of a dear friend, C. S. Lewis wrote, "No event has so

corroborated my faith in the next world as Williams did simply by dying. When the idea of death and the idea of Williams thus met in my mind, it was the idea of death that was changed." "So death is at work in us, but life in you."

One of the most significant books published since the war draws its title from Second Corinthians, "*Dying, We Live*"²—a collection of personal letters written by leaders of the German Resistance Movement as they awaited execution in Hitler's concentration camps. Not since the martyrs of the early Church has there been such a wealth of testimonials to a faith triumphant in death. The publisher, George N. Shuster, calls these documents "a treasure of wine pressed from the good grapes that ripen in the innermost places of man's being in vineyards that are holy and hushed."³ They died with Christ, these German martyrs, and out of their death came resurrection, the hope of new life for their own people. One distinguished German wrote to the editor, "We may hope that these documents will plead for us before the tribunal of a world still moved by anger and mistrust; surely they will plead for us before God."⁴ Life and death co-existing within the same person—so they did in Ewald von Kleist who wrote to his family before the Nazis hanged him in April 1945:

"I have always regarded death as a friend and saviour and not as a frightful thing nor as a punishment. Only the certainty of death makes life bearable. Only through death can we find happiness. Everything earthly is transient and vain. Happiness lies in the hands of God alone. It lies beyond life, and the gate that brings us to it is death. Therefore have no sadness if God frees me from this life and calls me to him."⁵

There is a place where we see the paradox of the Cross perpetually dramatized; that place is the Sacrament of our Lord's body and blood. A more marvellous miracle than transubstantiation, a most amazing interchange not of physical elements but of spiritual qualities takes place at the Lord's

Table. To those who love Christ in sincerity and truth, God gives bread and wine, the symbols of folly, weakness, suffering and death. We receive them in faith, and they become to us wisdom, strength, comfort and life. This is the paradox of the Cross; that the crucified Christ is a glorified Christ, and that the glorified Christ still bears the marks of wounds on his hands and his side. This is the strange paradox of the Christian life—that as we share our Lord's humiliation, so we shall share his glory; as we carry his Cross, so we shall wear his Crown.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BEYOND THE CROSS

IN the fifteenth chapter of his First Corinthian Letter, the Apostle Paul reckons with an interesting possibility: that the Easter Story may be a colossal figment of somebody's over-worked imagination. We say an "interesting" possibility, but the consequences of it are terrifying. With relentless, brutal logic, Paul draws them out. "If Christ be not raised," he says, "your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. . . ."

"But this is surely an extravagant claim," we hasten to protest. Suppose the story of Jesus did come to an end on Calvary, we still have God, we still have Christ himself, his life, his teachings, his character, his atoning death upon the Cross. Throughout these chapters we have gloried in the Cross, and it has spoken to us its own message of God's judgment and forgiveness and love and reconciliation and victory and power and sacrifice. The Cross is God's way of dealing with us and the way he has given us of dealing with our fellow-men. Would all of these cease to be true even if it were proved conclusively that Christ did not rise from the dead, that the Gospel ended with the Master's dying cry, "It is finished"?

On Wednesday, March 15, 1961, a religious service of historical significance took place in Westminster Abbey. Christian leaders of all Communion in Britain, except the Roman Catholic, assembled first to give thanks to Almighty God for the Authorized Version of the Bible on the 350th Anniversary of its publication, and then to present a fresh translation, *The New English Bible*, in the fervent wish "that it may bring new Light, and with the Light new Life to the readers of Holy Scripture, wherever the English language is spoken and understood."

At one point during the service, the General Director of the New Translation, the Rev. C. H. Dodd, ascended the pulpit to speak of the tireless and meticulous labours of great scholars in making available this new version of the Scriptures in the language of our own day. Dr. Dodd reminded the great congregation that two factors comprise the Gospel: God's act in Christ, and man's witness and interpretation of that act which make up the New Testament and give it unique authority. He also reminded us that the constitutive fact of early Christianity, the supreme fact to which the first Christians bore witness and which they sought to interpret, was not the Cross, but the Resurrection. When the eleven disciples met to choose a successor to Judas, they specified as the sole criterion a man who had been a witness to the Resurrection. Later these eye-witnesses to the redemption drama recalled the events of Calvary and interpreted their meaning for future generations, but they looked back on the Cross only from beyond the Cross, only from the vantage-point, the mountain-top of the Resurrection.

It matters tremendously that God did not leave the body of Jesus to rot in the dampness and darkness of a rock-hewn tomb. If the story of our redemption had ended on the Cross, we should not be redeemed, and the life and death of Jesus might better have not taken place, because at the very least we should not have heard about them. We must not forget that while the Cross represents our salvation, it represented to the disciples failure, defeat, disgrace, the shattered end of all their hopes and dreams. If the Risen Christ had not returned from death and revisited the Upper Room on Easter Day, the ten disciples, huddled there fearfully, would probably have spent the rest of their lives trying to live down the fact that they had been the victims of a monstrous illusion. Paul, an apostle born out of due time, articulated their unuttered feelings years later, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. . . ." Without the Resurrection, the Cross means nothing. Only from the brilliant light of

Easter Day can we look back and see what God was doing for us in the darkness of Good Friday. "But now," cries Paul, and it is a battle-cry, a shout of triumph, "now *is* Christ risen from the dead." Begone dismal and hideous imagination! The Easter Story is true, everlastingly true. We have gone beyond the Cross. Now we can look back from the vantage-point of the Resurrection and we can see what the Resurrection means for our understanding of the Cross.

I

The Resurrection of Christ means, first of all, that *the way of the Cross has been vindicated for all eternity*. Scripture tells us that after the brutal show on Calvary had ended, after the mobs had dispersed, after the crucified victims had been taken down from their crosses, after the little company of sorrowing friends had laid the body of their Lord in Joseph's tomb, "they rested on the Sabbath Day according to the commandment". There is something powerfully symbolic in that verse. Men rested; they could do no more. God and man working together in Jesus Christ had done their utmost; and now God seemed to take over on his own, because while deathly defeat gripped the world of earthly sense, another world was astir and in commotion, another mustering of forces was in progress, and the life which lay still in death was moving forth in triumph. It was as though God said to his Beloved Son, and through him to all who walk the way of a Cross, "You have played your part, you have remained faithful to the end, you have finished the work which I gave you to do. Now let the world hear my verdict on your perfect obedience!"

At the Cross two ways of life came to grips in a life-and-death struggle. We have already pointed up the contrast: on the one hand, the Roman Empire, the mightiest concentration of compulsive power in history; on the other hand, Christ saying, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." For the moment it seemed as though everything

base and wicked in unregenerate man had triumphed. Evil had won the day. Jesus said so when they arrested him, "This is your hour and the power of darkness." That, however, is in the limited perspective of our human vision. In God's eternal perspective an hour lasts only sixty minutes, and the man who believes in God looks beyond the darkness of evil's triumph to the brilliant light of God's verdict upon the struggle between all who repudiate his sovereignty and all who obey him.

The conflict still rages. We look out on our world today and we still see these two ways of life locked together in a life-and-death struggle: on the one hand, the way of vested interest, moral cowardice, brute force and calloused indifference; on the other hand, the way of unselfish service, moral courage, tender pity and suffering love. There are men who carry the sword and men who carry the Cross, men who would beat their fellows into slavery and men who would love their fellows into the Kingdom of God. Evil, trickery, violence and materialism have their hour, and sometimes that hour seems to last interminably, so that we can find no sane reason for continuing the struggle and beating our heads bloody against a stone wall. An Englishman said after the Second World War, after the blitz, the destruction and the loss of life, "One thing is sure, the Christian religion has 'had it' in this country. We have tried to set an example to the world. We have tried to help other countries and give moral leadership, but where has it got us? We have tried the so-called way of Christ. Well, obviously that way doesn't work!"

Sometimes the struggle becomes very personal. There was a brilliant doctor, a throat specialist, who all his life had made the practice of medicine a Christian ministry, working long hours spending himself for his patients, refusing to charge those who could not afford to pay. He saw younger doctors coming along, men with a cold, detached attitude toward their profession, taking much better care of themselves physically and financially, but still succeeding, still claiming the respect of their patients. The older man confessed to a friend, "These young

fellows may be right, and you and I may be all wrong." We know how he felt. We have wondered which path pays off in the end—the path of self-seeking or the path of service, the way of comfort or the way of labour, of forgiveness or revenge, gentleness or force, love or hatred.

There can be no doubt in the eternal perspective. God has pronounced his verdict on this struggle which rages within human society and the human heart. Men can go any way they choose so far as God is concerned, but by raising Christ from the dead, God has demonstrated decisively and conclusively that only the way of the Cross will have any future. A modern playwright makes one of his characters, a prosperous man, say, "I have never doubted that God was on my side." There have been interesting and equally blasphemous speculations about the alignment of God in the world struggle between democracy and communism. Which side does God support? Which will triumph in his power? The answer is that God has not revealed himself on the side of democracy or of any human ideology, but on the side of the Cross—the way of humility, love, forgiveness, suffering and perfect obedience to him. This is Christ's way and it will ultimately prevail. "Now is Christ risen from the dead," declares Paul, and he closes this glorious chapter by saying, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The struggle rages in our own lives and in the life of the world, but we can see beyond the struggle, beyond the darkness of Good Friday to the brilliant light of Easter Day.

II

The Resurrection of Christ means also that *the suffering of the Cross is a path to glory*. There is something worse in this life than having to suffer, and that is the inability to see beyond our suffering, and still worse, the refusal to believe that anything lies beyond our suffering. People commit suicide in the darkness

of despair. As long as they can look at leaden skies and still hope that some time the clouds will break, they can go on struggling with their pain, their misery and their loneliness; but let them lose that faint glimmer of hope, let them resign themselves to the darkness, and life for them becomes "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Did Jesus see beyond the darkness of his own suffering on the Cross? The New Testament seems to be divided at this point. When the penitent thief, who hung dying beside him, looked imploringly into his eyes and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingly power," Jesus granted this poor soul a boon beyond all expectation. "Today," he said, "this very day you will be with me in Paradise." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews described Jesus as the great martyr, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the Cross, despising the shame . . .", and we cannot believe that the joy before him consisted only in the doing of his Father's will. Other features of the Passion story create a different impression: for example, his agonized prayer in Gethsemane, "Let this cup pass from me," and more especially his cry of dereliction from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Sometimes, as one studies the account of Calvary, it seems that Jesus, like any frail mortal, found his vision blocked by a dense curtain of bodily pain and spiritual anguish. Yet, as the Master died with an exclamation of trust on his lips, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," he must in that moment have seen beyond the Cross, because we see beyond it, beyond the darkness of Good Friday to the brilliant light of Easter Day.

The suffering of the Cross a path to glory—the New Testament throbs with this hope. Paul believed that whoever suffers with Christ upon earth shall reign with him in glory. To the Romans he wrote, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Peter, in his virile letter to the persecuted Christians, called upon them to rejoice in their

trials, so that the genuineness of their faith, "more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ." It is a glorious vision that we see in the closing Book of Revelation, the vision of the martyrs before the throne of God, "a great multitude which no man can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, clothed in white robes and with palms in their hands. . . ." It was a vision that enabled men to suffer, that kept men in their obedience to God, that took them the way of a Cross, just because they could see beyond the Cross to that eternal victory which God accomplished in raising Christ from the dead and giving him glory at his own right hand.

Among the hotels near the famous Roman Catholic shrine at Lourdes in France, there is one called "Gethsemane", advertised as a desirable stopping-place "with all modern comforts". A typical anomaly, it goes far to explain why for so many people the sense of glory, of hope and expectation, has departed from the Christian life. They have nothing to look forward *to*, because they have nothing to look forward *from*. There is a tragic dimension in the Christian experience, a sense of involvement in the agony and misery of human life, and if that dimension is missing, then we defraud ourselves at the very core of our beings. Recall Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, that earthly utopia where all pain, struggle, discomfort and effort would be eliminated. Near the end of the story a savage comes from the outer fringes of that anaemic civilization and he protests to the controller, "It's too easy. I don't want comfort. I want God. I want poetry. I want real danger. I want freedom. I want goodness. . . ." When the controller assures the savage that he would be unhappy in any other kind of civilization, the savage replies, "I claim the right to be unhappy!"¹ "Was it not necessary," said the risen Lord to his disciples on the Emmaus Road, "that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" It is from the Resurrection that we can look back and see the meaning of the

Cross, but only from the Cross itself can we look beyond and see the Resurrection.

One of the greater American novels of our generation is William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.² It tells the story of the Compson family, a family that suffered heavily, and of how each member of the family reacted to suffering. Mr. Compson put himself beyond the reach of suffering by means of a cynical philosophy and a decanter of whisky. Mrs. Compson, a most odious character, evaded her responsibilities through a nauseating self-pity and a convenient hypochondria. Quentin Compson committed suicide; his brother Jason put on the armour of callousness; sister Candace reacted irresponsibly, and Benjy, being an idiot, did not seem to react at all. Only one character in the novel can stand up to the sound and the fury of life with tenderness and courage, and that one is Dilsey, the old Negro "mammy" who has been to the Compson family everything their mother should have been, and whose presence alone has prevented them from sinking into an even more complete state of collapse. There could be no more apt description of the Dilsys of the world than that which Faulkner gives them: "They endured." And Faulkner gives us a glimpse into the secret of their endurance. Dilsey saw her secret in the powerful sermon of a Negro preacher from St. Louis on Easter Day of 1928. Here was the promise that gave her hope and sustained the large spirit in her fatigued and debilitated body: "I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin, Dey kilt me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem what sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en hears de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead what got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb."³ Beyond the darkness of Good Friday, the brilliant light of Easter Day.

III

The Resurrection of Christ means that *God's final Word to*

men is a Word of Life. Arrestingly Dickens opens his immortal *Christmas Carol*: "Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change' for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail." Men once wrote a similar obituary to Jesus, or if they didn't write it, they thought it. "Jesus was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that." They saw him die, they saw him buried, and they saw the tomb fastened with the imperial seal bearing the signature of Pontius Pilate. Yes, Pilate signed the register, and Pilate's name "was good for anything he chose to put his hand to." Jesus of Nazareth "was as dead as a door-nail".

Is that the end of the matter? If it is, then the Apostle is right, we have not been saved from sin and death, and the Gospel is not a Gospel at all. Once more let us remind ourselves what the New Testament teaches about the significance of Christ's atoning death upon the Cross. Henri Barbusse tells of a conversation overheard during the First World War in a dugout full of wounded men. One of them knows he is dying, and he says to another: "Listen, Dominique, you've led a bad life. There are no convictions against me. There's nothing on the books against my name. Take my name. Take my life. I give it to you. Straight off, you've no more convictions. Take it. It's there in my pocketbook. Go on, take it, and hand yours over to me—so that I can carry all your crimes away with me."⁴

What we believe about the Cross is determined by what we believe about Christ. The New Testament sees Christ as not just a historical figure, not just a particular individual who lived in a particular time and place. Christ is our representative, the man whom God gave to sum up in his Person our common humanity, our history, our institutions, our racial solidarity, everything human; and because he represents us, because he is not just a man, but the perfect, sinless Representative Man, Christ can say to the human race precisely what the dying

soldier said to his comrade, "Take my life. I give it to you. . . . And hand your life over to me, so that I can carry all your sins away." Christ gives us his name and he takes ours. Therefore we hang on that Cross. All our failures and crime, our misery and wretchedness stand eternally condemned and eternally punished on Calvary. God deals with sinful humanity in exactly that way, the way he dealt with Christ—by bringing an end to us, crucifying us, killing us off. But is that the end of the matter? Is that the best we can hope for in our eternal destiny?

It would be, unless we saw beyond the Cross, unless the man of sin whom God crucified in Christ were released from the thralldom of eternal death and ushered by God's grace and power into a new order of eternal life. Paul was not engaging in theological speculation when he toyed with the awful possibility, "If Christ be not raised. . . ." For Paul Easter has a meaning as large as the universe itself. His own destiny and the destiny of all mankind hangs in the balance as he draws out the terrifying consequences of this grim possibility. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. . . ." "But now," cries Paul, and it is indeed a battle-cry, a shout of triumph, "Now is Christ risen from the dead. . . ." Just as surely as Christ was dead as a door-nail, so Christ, by God's grace and power, rose from the dead and lives for evermore. To the man who represents us, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, to that man, God's final Word is not death, but life. And because Christ represents us in his death, so he represents us in his Resurrection from the dead. It is we, the men of sin, our history, our institutions, our racial solidarity, who can "burst the lugubrious doors of gloomy hell" and by God's grace and power be released from the thralldom of eternal death and be ushered into a new order of eternal life. That is the possibility that Christ holds before us and before our world when he offers to exchange his name for ours—upon the Cross, death; but beyond the Cross, life eternal and everlasting.

Let us imagine a company of explorers following a guide through a rocky and barren wilderness. After travelling for several days, with no sight of human habitation, they are weary and footsore, and because their food supplies are beginning to run out, they have become frightened and panicky. However, the guide assures them that, though the country is unfamiliar to him, he can lead them to safety, and he tells them to rest while he does some exploring on his own. At length he returns with heartening good news. Through the evening dusk he has seen some lights in the distance and is absolutely certain that they shine from a village. More soberly he tells the group that so far as he can discern, the only route to the village lies through a deep, dark, dangerous canyon. There is simply no other way. It will be a perilous, painful journey that must be made with infinite care, but they can go through the darkness confidently because they have seen beyond the darkness to the lights of home.

It is surely a parable of man's life in the world today. We have a sense of being lost in a barren wilderness of hatred and fear, a sense of emptiness and hunger and of being at the mercy of elemental forces which we cannot control. But Christ comes up to us in our impotence and futility and he offers to lead us forward to a safe eternal habitation. It will be a dangerous journey requiring courage, because it will take us through a dark canyon of sacrifice, suffering and faith, the darkness of a Cross. We can follow Christ confidently, however, because we know that the Cross is not all, because we have seen beyond the darkness of Good Friday to the brilliant light of Easter Day. Christ is risen! Hallelujah! Therefore we have no fear of committing ourselves to the darkness. We can walk the way of a Cross because we have seen beyond the Cross.

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BENEATH THE CROSS OF JESUS

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